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MOTHER NATURE: PROGRESS

MOTHER NATURE
PROGRESS

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TWO BELGIAN PLAYS

BY

GUSTAVE VANZYPE

TRANSLATED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION BY
BARRETT H. CLARK

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1917

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PREFACE

Gustave Vanzype and the Modern Belgian Drama

IT is only natural that the dramatic products of a nation should be known abroad by its most striking examples. It was fitting that the modern French drama should first be introduced to English readers through translations of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. In the realm of modern Belgian drama, Maeterlinck has stood until recent times as the sole representative. But no one would maintain that Rostand and Maeterlinck are typical dramatists of their respective nations; they are rather outstanding exceptions. *Cyrano* and *L'Aiglon* and *Chantecler* are products of the Romantic school; *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *L'Intruse*, and *L'Oiseau bleu*, are dramatic and poetic embodiments of Maeterlinck's mystical philosophy. Interesting and beautiful as such plays are, they afford us no adequate idea of the day-to-day theater of the countries from which they come. If we wish to know the true French theater, we must turn to the plays of Lavedan, Capus, Lemaître, Donnay; if we would know of the contemporary drama in Belgium, we must turn to Paul Spaak, Fernand Crommelynck, and above all, to Gustave Vanzype.

The plays of Maeterlinck are already well known, and the dramatic poems of Verhaeren have begun to

be talked about if not appreciated, but the relation of these works to the Belgian stage, as distinct from Belgian literature and Belgian thought, has scarcely been touched upon. The reason, as I have already intimated, is not difficult to find: we have, naturally enough, sought only the important and the significant in what Belgium had to offer. But there is another sort of significance which must be taken into account: the significance of the great mass, the average. Our critical treatment of literature and art tends to adopt scientific methods; the process has its advantages, for in the last analysis the art of no country can be judged solely by its most striking products. The plays of Maeterlinck are, on the whole, not successful as drama; the dramatic poems of Verhaeren have little claim upon our consideration as acting plays: these are the striking products of Belgian drama — if by this we mean every similar work cast in the "dramatic" mold. Have the Belgians then no *plays?* The two plays here translated will, it is hoped, prove that they have. Both were produced in Belgium by Belgian actors, accepted by the limited public interested in indigenous work, and praised by Belgian critics.

Gustave Vanzype has not inaptly been called the Curel of the Belgian stage. Such sobriquets are common among Belgian authors, but their application hardly ever results in anything but confusion. Vanzype's mind is somewhat akin to that of the author of *Les Fossiles;* both dramatists are interested rather in the curious and the unusual in human psychology than the normal; both have a touch of the morbid, but beyond this the comparison should not be allowed to

extend. Curel has no message, he is not a writer of theme plays, he is at bottom an aristocrat; Vanzype believes that dramatists ought to use the stage as a pulpit. Curel takes an individual case and makes of it an interesting story, sometimes a deep study in human character; Vanzype attempts to generalize, to draw conclusions which *may* affect the morals and the intellect of mankind. In his article on Curel's *La nouvelle Idole*, he says: "I believe that the stage is a pulpit, and that the dramatist, whether he wills it or not — exercises an influence over his audience; he has no right to neglect or leave to chance the source of that influence, and allow it to spread at random. — He has the right to expose everything, but he ought to give his opinion, indicate his approbation or disapprobation of whatever happens. And if, in order to flatter, please, or amuse, the dramatist refuses to accept the rôle of preacher and commentator, if he makes evil attractive, or ridicules virtue and beauty, he transforms a great and powerful art into a despicable and dangerous trade. . . . He must keep within the domain of the everlastingly great ideas and conceptions." It is, I think, worth while to quote a few further extracts from Vanzype's own critical utterances, because they form a sort of declaration of faith and express not only this particular dramatist's ideals, but the aspirations of a group of playwrights and critics whose aim was to create a national Belgian drama, distinct from the ordinary importations from Paris. In his criticism of *Le Renouveau du théâtre*, which appeared in 1897, Vanzype writes (in the *Revue de Belgique*):

"You must first make yourself understood, assemble your audience, and speak the language it understands. This is far more worth while than speaking a more elevated language in the middle of the desert. . . .

"The public has a right to come to the theater for amusement, to throw off all the cares imposed upon it by the preoccupations and cares of life. The whole art of the dramatist consists in introducing an idea or ideas into the events he sets forth. . . .

"But the true power, the true genius, of the dramatist is in *not* formulating general ideas. Genius in this high form of art is altogether a matter of suggestion, mental suggestion, so to speak. The human event set forth must be presented with such grandeur and largeness of effect that the succession of events which go to make it up, and the characters which determine these events, form a gradual ascent, a logical sequence, which will set forth the idea without having it definitely spoken by the actor: the conclusion must stand forth self-evident. During the play, the auditor must be dominated by the play, become a part of it, and he must be made to think and feel with the author at the drop of the final curtain. He must not think and analyze for himself until afterward, because while the play is being acted before his eyes, he has no time to consider. A play is not a book which you may keep and open at will, and think over. In a play the pages are not turned by the reader: they pass, and he cannot stop them. This is why the dramatist must not set forth any complicated idea; he must be simple and clear, for it is imperative that the audience understand immediately.

"If the dramatist refuses to submit to this condition, without which a play fails to accomplish its purpose, if he thus refuses to write for the audience which is the sole excuse for the existence of the dramatic form, why does he write plays? Why not simply write books? . . .

"I firmly believe that the theater needs new blood, and I regret . . . that we have to go to Paris for what we do get. . . .

"What we are interested in is the true play, written by the artist. Our drama needs renovation, doubtless, but not as to form — unless we attempt to make clearer and more concise; we need new and fresh ideas. Let us avoid everything but the rapid exposition of action and keep only what movement and action are absolutely required to force the spectator to reflect. . . .

"The only works of art that survive are those in which the artist has been able to magnify the common things in life, the ideas, sensations, and facts which are common to all ages. If he has been able to do this in all simplicity, and call forth all the power and beauty in them, without additional comment, he has succeeded. This genuine artist has made the spectator his own critic and commentator. . . .

"We must therefore return to tradition, the sane and healthy tradition of the theater. We are forced to it inevitably, because we need no new forms. It is the function of a good play to do this: present characters in action which is proper and fitting to their interests and intelligence, and thereby interest and arouse emotion in the audience. But these characters must be so set forth and their acts so combined and unified and conducted, that their story shall stand

forth as a sort of lesson, not as a result of definitely stated ideas and precepts, but unconsciously, as it were, and spontaneously. This sort of play will differ from the play of the past only in subject-matter, which must be such as to interest the audience of the present time."

In Vanzype's appreciative criticism of Curel's *La nouvelle Idole*, above quoted, he proclaims the right of the dramatist to preach. The excerpts from the other article prove that Vanzype's ideas are not quite so narrow as they may at first have seemed. He believes that a play may or rather must contain an idea, but on the condition that that idea is not palpably demonstrated. At the very end of his Curel article he says: "Before the audience will consent to listen to ideas in the theater, it insists on seeing human beings like itself, struggling against the problems of life. . . . It is not enough in the theater to express an idea, it must rather be made to develop out of an event or a situation; the audience will not accept an abstract idea until it has been proven by experience."

True to his faith, Vanzype has expressed great ideas and conceptions in his best plays, but as the dramatist must, he has expressed them in specific terms. At times he generalizes, and becomes a sort of preacher, but at his best, as in *Les Étapes* and *La Souveraine*, he allows his audience to draw its own conclusions.

At first sight *La Souveraine* (here translated as *Mother Nature*) belongs to the already too numerous class of plays with an idea; it is, however, one of those plays in which the idea takes shape afterward. As with Brieux's *La Robe Rouge*, the audience becomes so

interested in the story and the characters that the central idea is not driven home until after the close of the play. A comparison of *La Souveraine* with a play like *Damaged Goods* will at once reveal the difference between a frank thesis play and a play with an idea. Brieux wrote his tract to state certain facts, to educate a certain portion of his public, and to call to the attention of the government the necessity for legal reform. In order to do this, he was forced to interpolate long discourses in his first act, and to sacrifice almost the whole of the last. As a play, *Damaged Goods* is a failure; its effect on public education and legal reform is another matter. In *La Souveraine*, Vanzype has no definite lesson to set forth: he is content to allow his characters to work out their destiny in an interesting story. He may justly be criticized, however, for some exaggeration in the character of Olivier. As with Paul Leglay in *Les Étapes* (*Progress*) we cannot help feeling that the dramatist has forced a note in making Olivier too rigid, in order to secure a more striking contrast with Renée. The dramatist was, of course, interested in Renée's story, and Olivier is after all only a subsidiary figure, a foil; but wherever any artist exaggerates in one part of his work, the rest must in some degree suffer. Similarly, in *Les Étapes*, Paul is made a little too rigid, and Madeleine a trifle too stubborn.

Vanzype's indebtedness to François de Curel is apparent in most of his work, though *Les Liens* is not a little reminiscent of *Ghosts*. His ideas are thoroughly modern, he sees struggles in the daily life of the middle classes which are eminently fitted for dramatic presen-

tation, but behind the petty struggles of doctors and scientists and artists, we are made to feel the presence of the eternal struggles.

The obvious shortcomings of the two plays in this volume detract very little from their dramatic effect. There is a grandeur of conception, a sweep, an undercurrent of passion and throbbing life which are truly representative of the rather somber but vital character of the Belgians.

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MOTHER NATURE

(*La Souveraine*)

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

La Souveraine was first produced at the Théâtre Molière, Brussels, in 1899

A WORD

I believe that a good play needs no preface, that it is sufficient in itself to express thoughts completely.

It is not my intention to comment on *La Souveraine* in this place; either the idea stands out clearly and comment is rendered superfluous, or else it is not clear, in which case the play is not worth a preface.

But I wish to explain myself on one point, because I would clear up a misunderstanding created perhaps by those who did not like the play. There are some who insisted that Olivier was a satire on the artist, the true artist. This is quite absurd. He who writes in Belgium, especially for the theater, where he can hope for nothing except the satisfaction of having created, and of having at great cost deserved the esteem of the very small public interested in good things, and especially when he is so fortunate as to find so disinterested a manager as M. Munie and such devoted artists as those of the company of the Théâtre Molière — such a one, I say, is inspired by the ambition to be an artist himself, and he would never think of poking fun at his brother-workers who are inspired by the very same ambition.

But if he feels the profoundest respect for the real artist, on the other hand he suffers and is irritated at the noisy racket of certain false esthetes, who think that a season box at fashionable concerts, the possession

of a few objects of art, and chatter about some obscure poet or forgotten painter entitle them to the position and dignity of an artist. He is well aware of the evil and danger of these sterile cynics, who smile disdainfully at all that bears fruit, and at sincere work of any sort. He knows that the public which listens to them, having nothing better to do with its time, often allows itself to be intimidated and influenced, to the detriment of every conscientious and dignified effort of true artists.

When the follies and absurdities and futility of such charlatans are exposed in public, there is no harm done to the real artists; these are rather defended against their worst enemies.

This was what I wished incidentally to do in this play; incidentally, only because I have tried to do more than merely satirize. But this was the only point I wished to explain; I have nothing to add to the whole play, which must, good or bad, stand on its own merits.

GUSTAVE VANZYPE

March 29, 1899.

Persons in the play:

OLIVIER
MÉRYAC
HEURTOUX, Renée's father
DARCHI, Olivier's father
ANDRÉ
RENÉE
BLANCHE, Olivier's sister
KLARY
MADAME HEURTOUX
A MAID

The scene is the drawing-room in Olivier's home, presumably in a large city of Belgium. The time is the present.

MOTHER NATURE

ACT I

The scene is a drawing-room used as a study. At the back is a large French window, with heavy curtains drawn halfway across. There are entrances right and left. To the left is a piano. Various small pieces of furniture of stained wood, English style. Pictures around the walls, plaster casts of Gothic sculpture, and engravings. The general effect is a strange one, for the decorator has evidently sought after novelty.

Renée and Mme. Heurtoux are present as the curtain rises.

RENÉE

It's a sad confession, mother. I don't know whether I have courage to tell you.

MME. HEURTOUX

But I asked you. And to whom else would you confess if not to your mother? How long has this been going on?

RENÉE

Always.

MME. HEURTOUX

Always? But — the first days, Renée?

RENÉE

They were no different from now.

MME. HEURTOUX

What!

RENÉE

I didn't understand then. In spite of all my confusion I felt instinctively that there was something else. I didn't know.

MME. HEURTOUX

But just after your marriage? The first few days?

RENÉE

Even during the first few days, during the moments which other women remember, moments of tenderness, passion, intoxication, he was cold and calm, insultingly calm!

MME. HEURTOUX

Has he always been that way?

RENÉE

Always.

MME. HEURTOUX

Did you never talk to him, try to bring him closer to you?

RENÉE

Oh, yes, after I came to see that *that* was the only possible way he could love me.

MME. HEURTOUX

What did he say?

RENÉE

He advanced theories and gave me long lectures on reason — which he never forgets, even when he kisses me!

MME. HEURTOUX

Does he try to justify himself?

RENÉE

He talked of all sorts of principles. He thinks I'm ridiculous. He gets impatient with me, and sometimes even angry. (*She hides her face in her hands*) If he'd only left me — ! Oh, mother, how can I tell you — ?

MME. HEURTOUX (*going to Renée and taking her hands, then, ill at ease, says hesitatingly*)

Come, dearie, now — you — see — is — Olivier still your husband?

RENÉE

When — he is — I feel so degraded and ashamed. I'm ashamed because every time I hope my love will change him. But — no —. Oh, mother, I'm so humiliated, so disgusted!

MME. HEURTOUX

Poor child! But you mustn't give up hope —

RENÉE

What hope? That he will change? That all at once he will become another man, and love his wife in a simple way, without thought and reason and all that? Impossible!

MME. HEURTOUX

Perhaps — you'll have the consolation — of — some one else — to love, some one who will fill your life —

RENÉE (*burying her face again in her hands*)

Dearest mamma, that's just what he doesn't want! I'm desperate. Oh, if I had a child, if I could even hope to have one, I'd be resigned to having my early dreams go as they have gone. The child could give me all the happiness and tenderness that I

miss now. But I can't even look forward to that. That is why I can't forget now. He's wounded me — I can't get over it; he himself couldn't make everything all right again. I can't even be the wife I want to be, that I would have been if he hadn't crushed all the good instincts out of me with his scepticism, his talk, and his everlasting analysis. You understand how revolting it all is, don't you, mother?

MME. HEURTOUX

Of course I understand, dear, but you see, I'm always afraid of misunderstanding things nowadays. It's all so different from what it was in my day: when I was a young woman, people did less discussing and reasoning. Of course, we were afraid of having too many children —

RENÉE

Yes, but you had them first! And you didn't force young girls into marriage. I'm so miserable, mother! If I had only a — child — ! Perhaps I should have understood, afterward. A tender and pure little life would have brightened my own.

MME. HEURTOUX

But Olivier still loves you?

RENÉE

He does *not* love me. He does nothing but talk and talk and try to prove that love is the result of a pathological predisposition. He talks about atavism and neurosis! He doesn't love me. He analyses love too much to know how to love.

MME. HEURTOUX

He is at least intelligent?

RENÉE

He has a brain, but that's not the same thing, mother. It's a matter of pride with him to have only a brain, and to stifle everything else that makes a man: love, passion, the sweet and holy follies, sublimely unreasonable — the things that make you happy. He's just a brain. There are many others like him nowadays.

MME. HEURTOUX

You frighten me, Renée. Don't you love your husband any more?

RENÉE

It makes no difference to him whether I do nor not. If he found out I didn't care for him, he would deliver a long-winded lecture on the psychology of my case.

MME. HEURTOUX

What things you say! Surely you're exaggerating!

RENÉE

Not at all. You don't know him.

MME. HEURTOUX

You seem almost to hate him.

RENÉE

I don't hate him. But everything about him disgusts me: everything he does and says strikes at what is best in me. His detestable *intellect* crushes everything good and beautiful in life, everything you have taught me to respect, everything that I feel is true — even life itself.

MME. HEURTOUX (*after a pause*)

Renée, look at me. You aren't in love with any one else?

RENÉE (*looking her mother straight in the eyes*)

No, mother.

MME. HEURTOUX (*surprised*)

Indeed? You don't even protest?

RENÉE

I don't love any one — at least, any one I can name, any one I know. But I do love, as I did when I was a young girl and dreamed of the future, of a husband who would not consider me with his brain alone, but one who would reason and love with his heart and his passions — a man, a real man! But I give you my word, I am not in love with any one. In spite of all my unhappiness, I am a faithful wife.

MME. HEURTOUX

You must continue to be that, Renée; you must be brave and do your duty to the end. Who knows, everything passes away and is forgotten? If your husband —

RENÉE (*bitterly*)

Poor mother! — Sh, here he comes. If he heard you talking about courage and duty, he would make fun of you and ask you for definitions.

[*Enter Olivier, followed by Darchi and Heurtoux.*

OLIVIER

In your day! Your day! Of course, my dear father-in-law, in your day people didn't think as they do now. Ideas have gone —

HEURTOUX

Forward or backward?

DARCHI

Why, forward! Humanity never goes back. Progress —

OLIVIER (*interrupting*)

To adhere to the ideas of your youth is, I repeat, a deplorable thing.

HEURTOUX

Well, I'm old —

OLIVIER

So is my father. He is as old as you.

DARCHI

Nonsense, I'm fifty years younger!

OLIVIER (*to Heurtoux*)

True. He has been able to discard the sentimentality that clung round him. He has disciplined his mind and adopted the strict methods of modern analysis, which submits everything to the acid test of reason. It is our aim to act with discernment, to escape the ready-made notions which are not under the control of our intellects, and the absurd consequences of giving in to the passions. We bring each thought and act to the tribunal of dispassionate judgment, and base our deductions on the foundation of modern science and philosophy. We deny the intangible. Nietszche —

DARCHI

There's a master mind for you!

MME. HEURTOUX

Have you read him, Monsieur Darchi? Explain his theory. I'm deeply interested.

DARCHI (*embarrassed*)

I know his theories very well — oh, yes. Olivier often talks about him. But the whole thing is rather

complicated. You ought to have some preliminary preparation if I am going to explain him to you. Isn't that so, Olivier?

OLIVIER

Of course.

HEURTOUX (*to Renée*)

Do you know why Olivier tells me all these interesting things? Because I refuse to grant that a husband has the right to deceive his wife! (*Smiling*) Now you're warned!

RENÉE

I know what he thinks about that.

HEURTOUX (*still smiling*)

Aren't you worried?

OLIVIER (*seated at his desk, turning the pages of a book*)

Renée knows I am master of my passions. It is my aim to be a strong man. Now, the strong man can be strong only after freeing himself from the bondage of his senses, his passions. But just because I am freeing myself, I can see that others are still slaves. Those who have succeeded ought to be free to dispose of their persons as they see fit.

DARCHI

Certainly. You must look at it from the point of view of the artist. Heavens and earth, my poor Heurtoux, how out-of-date you are!

HEURTOUX

Perhaps I am. But you see, I can't make up my mind, and never will, to abolish everything that has brought me peace and happiness. I don't know whether it's because I'm prejudiced or, as you say, out-of-date, but I always held what were called in my

day liberal ideas, and I never had much respect for the conventions. But there are some conventions that are absolutely necessary, that are based on the necessities of human society and the consideration of one man for another. Conjugal fidelity or if you prefer, the fidelity of one lover to the other, is one of them. A man and a woman who love each other are naturally jealous, and even when they don't love each other or if one of them ceases to love the other, it seems to me a beautiful thing for them to remain faithful; it spares pain and wounded pride. Of course, you call that rank sentiment —

OLIVIER

Yes, because among intelligent people, people who use their reason, there is no such thing as jealousy and that sort of pride. Those things are mere words.

DARCHI

They've gone out of fashion long ago!

RENÉE

They are as old as the world, because they express sentiments and passions whose very existence you complain of. But the *things* themselves have not changed since man was first created, since the first human being said "I love you!" to the other, and his mate naturally asked, "For always?" — I prefer that. It makes the function of love a noble and beautiful act, and not a base instinct.

DARCHI (*laughing*)

"For always!" Ha! ha, For always! Poor little Renée!

OLIVIER

The same delusion, the same mistake! You try to impose an unnecessary yoke on the man. Why?

HEURTOUX

To spare others' pain.

OLIVIER

That is not his affair. Let them defend themselves, together with their absurd sentimentality.

HEURTOUX

My dear Olivier, if I didn't know you, I would think you quite ferocious.

OLIVIER (*disdainfully*)

Not at all; I am simply a reasonable human being, and I have great respect for logic. You don't understand me, you cannot understand me, because you are not ready to look at these things dispassionately, and analyze them on the basis of the great scientific and philosophical facts of which you are quite ignorant.

HEURTOUX (*good-naturedly*)

That's true.

DARCHI

You see, old man, you must know!

HEURTOUX

I don't know, but I believe that there are certain human relationships in which science and philosophy count for nothing. I've been married for thirty years, I've made my wife happy, brought up children —

OLIVIER (*interrupting*)

Who are needlessly suffering because you have developed their emotions — your daughter, for instance.

HEURTOUX (*seriously*)

Suffering? Renée, have you anything to complain of? Were you ever unhappy through any fault of mine?

RENÉE

I am happy, and I am glad to be what you made me, father. If I suffer sometimes, it is not your fault. I am proud that I can suffer that way.

HEURTOUX (*anxiously*)

But you do suffer? Why? Aren't you happy?

OLIVIER (*indifferently*)

I really didn't know —

RENÉE

It makes no difference, father. I meant I suffer once in a while, the way every one does. You mustn't worry about it.

MME. HEURTOUX (*taking Renée's hand*)

Brave girl!

OLIVIER

I don't think Renée knows what she's talking about. Very often she is upset and worried, and —

HEURTOUX (*conciliatory*)

She is very sensitive, Olivier. You must take that into account. I don't think you'd be capable of wounding her intentionally, but —

RENÉE

Please, father!

DARCHI

Now, now, let's not have a family quarrel! Tears and all that! Octave Feuillet nonsense! I'm going!

HEURTOUX

Be serious, Darchi.

DARCHI

Never! It's too stupid.

HEURTOUX

Isn't it only natural that I should consider my daughter's happiness? Of course, I have confidence in your son —

DARCHI

My dear fellow, do you imagine a boy like Olivier, a keen observer and psychologist, doesn't know how to handle women? My son!

MME. HEURTOUX

We are not discussing "women"; this concerns Renée.

RENÉE

Father! Mother! This is all very painful to me. Please don't worry about what I just said. I was speaking generalities.

OLIVIER

It was wrong of you, my dear, especially before your highly emotional and excitable parents.

[*Blanche opens the door.*

BLANCHE

May I come in?

RENÉE

Surely.

[*Enter Blanche, followed by André and Méryac, who wears hunting clothes.*

BLANCHE

Here we are! How are you? We've brought your cousin Méryac. We just happened to meet him, but he didn't want to come.

ANDRÉ

He didn't think he looked beautiful enough.

MÉRYAC (*to Renée*)

I beg your pardon, Madame, these clothes — I've been hunting.

RENÉE

But this is the country, Monsieur Méryac, and we are neighbors.

OLIVIER

What a singular passion!

BLANCHE

What?

OLIVIER

Hunting.

MÉRYAC

It is not a passion with me. But I love movement and outdoors. Hunting serves as a good pretext for riding up hill and down dale. I delude myself into thinking I have a definite end in view.

OLIVIER

Can't you satisfy your desire without actually hunting?

MÉRYAC

I hardly hunt at all, only, as I told you, I like to have an object in view. I need it. When I have a little leisure time from business and go even for a walk, I must have some destination.

OLIVIER

Action mania!

MÉRYAC (*smiling*)

The *desire* for action, yes!

BLANCHE (*to Olivier*)

You all look so serious. What were you discussing, Monsieur Brother?

OLIVIER

A very involved matter. You wouldn't understand.

HEURTOUX

I think she would understand very easily.

ANDRÉ (*to Olivier*)

Would I?

OLIVIER

No.

BLANCHE

Unfortunately, because every one should understand in the family.

HEURTOUX (*to Méryac, who now stands by Renée*)

You were speaking of your factory. I'm very much interested. Shall we go into the garden? I want to ask you something.

[*They go out, Renée following them with her eyes.*

DARCHI (*to Blanche*)

You talk like a middle-class housewife. When you're dealing with a great intellect like your brother's, a man engaged in such deep thinking, isn't it only natural that the points discussed should reach a level to which no woman's mind can attain?

BLANCHE

Oh? You're very gallant. André always explains when I don't understand, and I always see. And André is no fool. We "raise each other," as it were, to that "level" you were speaking of. And when we get there, we don't talk, we are glad enough merely to *feel*, like good middle-class people — which

we are. But with the two children, I haven't much time for the "heights." I bring up my children — which is more important.

ANDRÉ (*who has meantime seated himself, rises and goes to another chair*)

And just as "elevated."

RENÉE

How are they?

ANDRÉ

Bab had an attack of tonsilitis. We were very much upset.

MME. HEURTOUX

Poor little dear!

RENÉE

Is he better now?

BLANCHE

He's well. Otherwise, you may be sure we shouldn't be here.

OLIVIER (*nervously*)

Of course, of course.

DARCHI

Never have a moment's peace with those messy youngsters!

BLANCHE

Papa, don't *you* philosophize! You know you adore them.

DARCHI

There they are! I don't dislike them, but I could easily dispense with them.

ANDRÉ (*who shifts to another chair*)

You yourself didn't dispense with children! (*Pointing to his wife*) There's the proof. Thank you.

DARCHI

I wasn't thinking of you at the time. No, I didn't dispense with children, because when I married there were still prejudices. But if I had my life to live over again —

BLANCHE

You would follow Olivier's example, and not be in any hurry. He isn't in a hurry about anything at all. We're waiting for his book. What is it called?

OLIVIER (*piqued*)

What?

DARCHI (*respectfully*)

Cogitations.

BLANCHE

Illustrated?

OLIVIER

A complete book needs no illustrations.

ANDRÉ

That's not the same title you gave us a short while ago?

OLIVIER

It's not the same book.

ANDRÉ

What about the other?

OLIVIER

I'm not going to write it. I wasn't satisfied.

BLANCHE

Well, try to finish this one.

OLIVIER

It makes no difference if I don't. I write in order to think.

BLANCHE

How funny! I thought people wrote after they had thought.

MME. HEURTOUX

How unkind of you, Blanche!

OLIVIER (*disdainfully*)

I am used to my sister. She doesn't bother me. (*To André, who has just left his chair again*) What on earth are you doing?

ANDRÉ

I'm tired, and I'm trying to rest.

OLIVIER

Then sit still!

ANDRÉ

I'd like to, only I can't find a chair —

OLIVIER

You have plenty to choose from.

ANDRÉ

I see that, but not one of them seems made to sit in. They're pretty, and interesting, but every one of them's damned uncomfortable. What I want is a vulgar, simple, old-fashioned armchair, with nothing artistic about it, where I can rest my arms and legs and neck. Have you anything of that sort in your house?

MME. HEURTOUX

Come with me, André. I'll find you one in the garden.

[*Olivier shrugs his shoulders.*

ANDRÉ (*to Mme. Heurtoux*)

You're my salvation!

MME. HEURTOUX (*to the others*)

Are you coming?

[*She goes out with André.*

OLIVIER

I want a breath of air. I've been overworking this morning.

DARCHI

What have you been doing?

OLIVIER

Thinking about the second chapter of my book.

DARCHI

I'll come with you.

BLANCHE

Good! Renée and I can have a little chat together.

DARCHI (*as he leaves*)

Don't tire yourself.

[*The men go out.*

BLANCHE (*going to Renée and taking her hands*)

My dear Renée! How sad you look! What's the matter?

RENÉE

I'm not — oh, nothing — only a little nervous.

BLANCHE

Why don't you tell me? I know you're suffering. I love you dearly, and I feel I'm much more your sister than his.

RENÉE

Whose?

BLANCHE

Your husband's. It's funny, perhaps it's terrible, but I've felt that ever since you were engaged. I

feel more a member of your family than his. I'm so little like him.

RENÉE

That's true. You're so good, Blanche dear. And you know I love you, too. I always like to have you here. You seem to bring some of my past life with you, and my childhood — a breath of healthy sunny air into this house. You are a sort of living happiness; your life is what I dreamed of when I was just awakening to life. You carry around with you all sorts of love, and joy, the pride of motherhood, of duty gladly done, and a realization of happy responsibilities. I imagine your hair is full of warm caresses and your cheeks bright with children's kisses.

BLANCHE

Renée, you *are* suffering!

RENÉE

No, no, I'm not. But I can't help feeling this way when I see you so happy, and simple, and pure, and good. I'm romantic, I suppose, but I can't help being thrilled when I see in you the realization of all the dreams I dreamed when I was a girl of fifteen. Like all girls, I closed my eyes and dreamed of marriage; I closed them partly from embarrassment and partly in order to see more clearly my husband and myself, as I imagined we would be. In that dream we were what you and André really are: two happy children, very much in love, but our love was tempered with a sort of dignity; and we looked at life and resolved to be supremely happy, and love each other always, and smiled at the thought of having a

family of two, three, four — I didn't stop to count, but I could see little curly heads — ! Oh, you are my dream, the dream I used to blush for then, but now —

BLANCHE

You regret! Poor Renée! Olivier is a poor substitute for the husband of your dreams, isn't he?

RENÉE (*trying to control herself*)

I don't say that; I'm not complaining of Olivier.

BLANCHE

I am so sorry for you, Renée. I see how much you are suffering. And I know Olivier too well not to realize that your dream — which is the ideal of every decent, normal girl — was doomed from the beginning. I know him: he is not bad, nor is he good. He's dried up in his formulas; he has regulated his instincts by rules — physiological and psychological rules. He always thinks of people as cases and problems, and that has killed all the humanity in him. He has only one object in life; to prove that everything accomplished by mankind before he was born is absurd. He believes he has reached a very high stage of development, but he merely lives an extremely false sort of life, made up of absurd desires and ridiculous ambitions. He is one of those who only complicate existence and despise its simplicity because they can't understand it.

RENÉE

Blanche, you *are* a severe judge!

BLANCHE

I tell you this because I know you see him as I do. It's not altogether his fault: papa was too enthusi-

astic about Olivier's great progress as a young man, and he very soon became a follower instead of a guide. Poor papa, he's developed a temperament, and he merely echoes and exaggerates whatever Olivier says, and conceals as he would something vile whatever there is in him of tenderness and feeling — or else makes a joke of it. Fortunately, I know he is hiding his real feelings, and I love *them*. Poor Renée! You're so full of the joy of life, and so sensitive! You must be very unhappy.

RENÉE

I am.

BLANCHE

Won't you confide in me — a little? Dearest. I want to be able to console you.

RENÉE

How can you console me? I'm not the sort of person who can be consoled. I have simply made a mistake: I married unwisely, and I must accept the consequences. I thought that a man like Olivier — an artist, at least an instinctive artist — would be more sensitive, better than other men; it must have been his ideas and his way of talking that attracted me. But that soon wore off. Now I must try to resign myself. It's too bad, though, because resignation is not in my make-up. I have a keen sense of duty, but I'm constantly afraid that the nervousness that keeps me up to the mark, and which is only the result of my pride, will some day lead me to break away and do something I might regret. (*She stops a moment, then, mastering herself*) But

I *will* control myself, don't worry, Blanche dear. You are so good to me, and I'm very grateful for your frankness and your love, even though you can't do anything to help me. I've tried everything with Olivier, and as for myself, there's nothing left. Kiss me! (*They kiss. André's voice is heard in the garden: "Blanchette, where are you, Blanchette?"* There, go to your husband in the garden. He's bored when you aren't with him. How you love each other! Go on! I'll not come with you. I must calm down a little.

BLANCHE

All right. See you soon. (*She goes out, saying*) Here I am! Here I am!

[*Renée goes and looks at herself in the mirror, then drops, as if in a dream, into a chair. After a short interval, enter Méryac. Renée does not notice him. He makes a few steps toward her before she is aware of his presence. He looks at her.*

MÉRYAC

Madame!

RENÉE

You, Monsieur?

MÉRYAC

Have you forgiven me?

RENÉE

There is nothing to forgive. It isn't your fault that you love me. But I do think you might have spared me by saying nothing about it. I hope you realize you had nothing to gain?

MÉRYAC

I love you so deeply, so passionately, that I couldn't help telling you.

RENÉE (*dreamily*)

You — love — me —

MÉRYAC

Ever since I came here and saw you for the first time. You were there at the piano, playing Grieg's *Solveig's Lied.* You remember —. The picture is as vivid as it was then.

RENÉE

You ought never to have spoken.

MÉRYAC

That was out of the question. When you are in love, you can't control yourself. The person who can reason at such a time can't really be in love. At least, I can't imagine such self-control. I feel; I am excited; I listen to my heart-beats and not the voice of reason. I confess I'm impulsive: I'm the blind agent of forces that may be a bit confused, but I feel that they are at base absolutely right. They drive me to love or to hate. It may be pure instinct, but there's something right in it all the same. I have more confidence in it than in the hypothetical deductions of logic. Try to reason and you find you can reach diametrically opposite conclusions on the same point, depending on where you start. The blind forces *I* give in to drive me in one direction, toward one thing and one alone. That is why I love you, that is what has told me you are unhappy —

RENÉE

What do you know about it?

MÉRYAC

I don't know, but I feel. That was what drove me to tell you I loved you. I wouldn't have said a word if I had felt you were happy. My instinct would have told me to hold my tongue. I am ready to do anything for you, carry you off in my arms, without stopping to consider right or wrong. I love you, I adore you, because — because — well, because I love you! (*Renée has meanwhile risen. She looks fixedly at Méryac, and is deeply stirred. There is a pause*) How you look at me!

RENÉE

I never heard any one talk that way!

MÉRYAC

You see? Your husband doesn't love you, and you aren't happy. I felt sure. If I hadn't, I swear I would never have spoken a word. I would have had courage. I would have left you to him —

RENÉE

You will, my poor friend. I tell you once for all, I hold nothing against you, and I even confess you have made me happy, because you have given me a new and a fresh emotion. Even though I might have allowed you to continue, even though I am unhappy because my husband doesn't love me as I once hoped I would be loved — in spite of all that, I refuse to do anything I might afterward regret.

MÉRYAC

But you have the right — !

RENÉE (*interrupting him*)

That same confused power you spoke of a moment ago tells me I should be very wrong to give in; it tells me to try to find happiness with my husband and to struggle till the last shred of hope is gone.

MÉRYAC

And then?

RENÉE

Then — if I know I have failed — then — I don't know. But I must hope. Now leave me, please. They might think it strange we should be alone together for so long. Leave me. (*She offers him her hand*) Good-bye.

MÉRYAC (*holding her hand in his*)

You don't object to my coming here again?

RENÉE

No. That would mean I was afraid of myself.

MÉRYAC

Good-bye.

[*He walks slowly away, and out. Renée then goes quickly to the window. Méryac is seen on the terrace outside the windows at the back. Renée watches him for some moments, then goes to the piano and, under an evident strain, begins to play. Enter Olivier.*

OLIVIER

Is that Grieg?

RENÉE

Yes: *Solveig's Lied.*

OLIVIER

Have you been here all the time? They were looking for you in the garden.

[*He sits at his desk, takes up a magazine and begins reading.*

RENÉE (*after a pause*)

Olivier!

OLIVIER (*without looking up*)

What is it?

RENÉE

Have they gone?

OLIVIER

They went for a walk.

[*He continues reading.*

RENÉE (*going to the desk and sitting down near her husband*)

Olivier!

OLIVIER

What is it, my dear?

RENÉE

Don't read now.

OLIVIER

When can I read? I was constantly interrupted this morning; first your father and mother —

RENÉE

Mother?

OLIVIER

Yes, your mother, who was complaining to me about you.

RENÉE (*suddenly*)

Don't you think it more worth while to talk about me than to read?

OLIVIER

I know very well I shall never be able to convince you that your happiness — which is, after all, a purely fictitious thing — depends entirely on yourself. You see, you must learn to analyze a little, and form a conception of life in general and marriage in particular which shall come a little nearer to the actual facts. You mustn't give way to the muddled confusions of a raving romantic. Are you unhappy? Are you sure that the very fact of your mentioning it does not in advance constitute its refutation?

RENÉE

Is that all you have to tell me? Don't you love me any more?

OLIVIER

Of course I do, of course. I merely object to your boarding-school girl's notions. I don't want love to take the place of reason and upset the rational arrangement of our existence.

RENÉE (*slowly, as she recalls Méryac's words*)

The person — who can reason — isn't really in love.

OLIVIER (*going to her*)

I do love you. Come, now (*smiling*), forget everything, Rénee. How beautiful you are! I love you now, dear, I love you deeply. (*He takes her hand, then her arm*) You're not very reasonable, but that is what makes you so tempting. And you always get what you want, don't you? I do love you. That's

what you want, isn't it? (*Rénee allows herself to be embraced*) You are just as I want you to be. You are my own darling wife. Don't think, just love me. You are so lovely!

RENÉE (*suddenly tearing herself from him*)

No, no, no! Yes, I *do* want to be your wife, I wish it with all my heart and soul, but I want to be altogether your wife — or else not at all. I've suffered too long from your selfish and calculating love. I was on the point of giving in once more, but I saved myself. No, no, I refuse to be merely your pleasure. I want to love you, but not be a passive instrument. Yes, I want to be loved, but I want to be a woman, a whole woman — a mother! Otherwise — no, no, no! That is too sickening, too disgusting! Your selfish and cowardly love has no beautiful purpose; you forget the true end of love, that's beautiful even when you don't think of it. But never to think of it, to avoid it, to decide to have no children, whose presence would purify and help us — No, no, I can't and I won't.

OLIVIER

Really, this is becoming a mania with you. I have told you —

RENÉE

You have told me! And you gave me cold, selfish and cowardly reasons, and false science. You were afraid.

OLIVIER

I have already told you that I feel I have no right to impose upon another human being the obligation

to live and to suffer. That right is really not a right at all, and only unthinking people assume it. I am not one of them. Whenever I see children, I can't suppress a feeling of horror toward those who dared bring them into the world, and impose upon them, as the result of a mere caprice, the great task of life.

RENÉE

And when I see children, I think of their smiles and laughter.

OLIVIER

Pure selfishness!

RENÉE

Selfishness! My happiness is the happiness of making them glad, of giving up my life for that purpose, showing them the happiness and beauty of life, preparing them for existence, and returning to them the joy and tenderness they give me. You call the love of parents for their children selfishness! You don't believe in it. You are simply afraid to assume the responsibility. That is all your reasoning amounts to. I want the joys of a mother as well as of a wife. I want to live a whole life; no woman has done that unless she knows the joy of motherhood.

OLIVIER (*going to her*)

Come, now, Rénee, don't get so excited.

RENÉE (*close to him*)

Don't touch me! I shan't be weak again. I've often given in because I loved you and was carried away at the moment. But I tell you, in my love for you there is also a mother's love. I want to have

children. If your love won't give them to me, I don't want your love!

OLIVIER

This is ridiculous. Really, my dear, you must be out of your senses.

RENÉE

Take care, Olivier, you must protect me against my thoughts, against my dreams.

OLIVIER

How do you mean?

RENÉE

By understanding them, and by consenting to live without so much reasoning and analysis. Just live and be happy. (*Again, as she remembers Méryac's words, and repeating them*) Without stopping to consider right or wrong!

OLIVIER (*taking up his magazine again*)

Poor Renée, you're nervous, that's what's the matter with you. I must work now. I've begun a chapter on Integral Logic.

RENÉE

Be careful, Olivier!

OLIVIER

What about?

RENÉE

About me!

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is the same. Olivier is seated at his desk. Klary, in a long and ample gown, with a fillet round her hair, stands leaning on the back of a chair, in a studied pose.

KLARY

Dear Master, yes, I dream of that: a Flemish interior, dirty whitewashed walls, and furniture of white wood. And just a few Japanese vases here and there. Human souls seem larger against a simple background. And to recite poetry there — in a murmur, a whisper, so softly that you can scarcely distinguish whether it be a human voice that profanes it or no — ah! I'd love it. I was thinking about it only yesterday as I stood before a Primitive in the gallery. A masterpiece!

OLIVIER

Of whom?

KLARY

Unknown. That made it infinitely more beautiful. Don't you feel somehow that a picture by an Unknown is nobler, more mysterious, more captivating, more beautiful, than one by a well-known artist?

OLIVIER

Neatly phrased. May I use it?

KLARY

Why stultify our thoughts by writing them down, by submitting them to such degrading labor? Yes, the so-called Masters, with their celebrated works so soiled by the admiration of the mob, no longer

possess for me the magic of great art. I must have the mystery of things whose story is hidden in the obscure past, lost, or considered unimportant. Their very humility stirs me. Oh, that little Primitive!

OLIVIER

Where is it?

KLARY

Behind the door in the large Van Eyck room.

OLIVIER

I know: a Virgin; marble floor, little trees, a tower in the background —

KLARY

That's it. What lovely marble!

OLIVIER

But that's a Snellaert.

KLARY

A Snellaert! Why did you tell me? Now the mystery is gone! That was the most beautiful thing about it. You are too cruel.

OLIVIER

How is your St. George progressing?

KLARY

I scraped it out.

OLIVIER

Why?

KLARY

It was too definite, too clear. I like only sketches, vague outlines, indeterminate colors, so I scraped it. The St. George began to look like a human being — awfully commonplace. I'm beginning an Orpheus, but my Orpheus is without the love-motive —

OLIVIER

You are a true artist. The man who marries you will be lucky.

KLARY

When one devotes oneself to art, one never marries. The artist ought to experience every impression, and always seek new ones. (*Looking at him*) Now you, for instance, are not where you belong: your existence is commonplace in the extreme. You spend your life with ordinary people, because you are married, and faithful to your wife. All your impressions are on a dead level.

OLIVIER

What do you know about it?

KLARY

Oh — I am just supposing.

OLIVIER

I want to prove how wrong you are.

[*He goes to her and kisses her.*

KLARY (*coldly*)

There's nothing so much about a kiss! Do you think so? Does Lohengrin ever kiss Elsa?

OLIVIER (*nonplussed*)

Alas, I've not seen the Grail!

KLARY

You should try to behave as if you had.

OLIVIER (*solemnly*)

You are right. One must detach himself, live a spiritual life, nourished by reflection. But I am nearer that sort of life than you imagine. You see,

I need help and encouragement, some one with whom I can commune and exchange ideas, and dream dreams, and tell of my contempt for life —

[*Enter the Maid with a cup of bouillon.*

MAID

Monsieur's bouillon.

OLIVIER (*slightly annoyed*)

What is it?

MAID

The bouillon Monsieur ordered for four o'clock. It's four now, Monsieur.

OLIVIER

Very well.

[*The Maid puts the cup on a small table and goes out.*

KLARY

Doesn't your wife understand you?

OLIVIER

The only things my wife ever attaches any importance to are the current notions of sentimentality. She knows nothing of my aspirations as an artist, of my dream of a perfect intellectual life inspired solely by reason and ideas, and detached from all the pettinesses of existence and the baser appetites.

KLARY

You should never have married.

OLIVIER

How was I to know? I thought I was planning my life very well. Some day I shall write a book about the pains of existence, of the sufferings one must undergo merely to live. It's so debasing. (*He mechanically reaches for the bouillon, which he swallows*

at a gulp) I beg your pardon. I always take it at four. I'm a little tired and overworked.

KLARY

I take peptone. I detest meals. Whenever I eat, I feel the vulgarity of material things to my very finger-tips. I don't dare take up a brush or touch the piano.

[*Enter Darchi.*

DARCHI

Ah, little Lilian! How are you?

KLARY

I'm alive, and therefore ailing.

DARCHI

That's not polite to us. Were you discussing art with my son?

OLIVIÈR

Oh, yes. You've returned early. Is the concert over?

DARCHI

No. I was disgusted. Just think — you'd never guess — they played Gounod! I escaped.

KLARY

Do you still care for concerts? I never go. The only music I understand or like is my own improvisation. And then to have to listen to music in company with a whole mob of people! Perish the thought!

DARCHI

You're rather severe. But *we* aren't a "whole mob of people." I hope *we* don't inspire you with the same disgust?

OLIVIER

I think she is right.

DARCHI

So do I, so do I. That goes without saying. Sensitive and delicate temperaments like ours suffer through contact with the impressionable mob of vulgarians. I'm disgusted with myself for going to that concert. (*To Klary*) All the more so as I have lost so much time with you. It's such a pleasure to find a woman of your stamp, so intelligent and independent. *You* have no silly prejudices, you're not romantic and sentimental. You are strange, fascinating, novel: you are a real product of the age. You belong almost to to-morrow.

OLIVIER

You see, papa's in love with you!

[*Enter Renée and Blanche, left.*

RENÉE (*to Olivier, as she catches sight of Klary*)

I beg your pardon. I thought you were alone! (*Distantly*) Mademoiselle!

KLARY (*familiarly*)

How do'ye do, Madame?

RENÉE

Very well, thank you.

OLIVIER (*to Klary*)

I should like you to meet my sister, Madame Loviat. (*To Blanche*) Mademoiselle Klary Lilian, the painter.

[*Renée goes out. Olivier is annoyed.*

BLANCHE

Ah, it was Mademoiselle who exhibited *The Apparition?*

KLARY (*pleased*)

Yes, Madame. Do you remember it?

BLANCHE

Yes. Very pretty, though I was never quite able to distinguish what was in the midst of the iris. Was it a man or a woman?

KLARY (*with a disdainful smile*)

An apparition, Madame.

BLANCHE

Of course. The color was attractive. Bab insisted it was the Virgin. (*Smiling*) Bab is my eldest — five years old. He paints, too — water-color landscapes. They're very nice. But when both children start painting!

KLARY

Have you two, Madame?

DARCHI

I am twice a grandfather — I blush to admit!

KLARY (*to Blanche*)

I'm sorry for you.

BLANCHE

You're sorry for me! Why? I'm delighted. It's the most natural thing in the world. Don't you like children?

KLARY

Very much: they're nice — other people's.

BLANCHE

Wouldn't *you* like to have two some day?

KLARY

I'll never have any.

BLANCHE

I beg your pardon, but are you *Mademoiselle* Klary Lilian? Mademoiselle?

KLARY

Certainly, Madame.

BLANCHE

Then let me tell you, Mademoiselle, I think it's rather terrible to be so sure!

OLIVIER

Now, Blanche — there's a misunderstanding. You don't see!

BLANCHE

No, I don't see!

DARCHI

Blanche, you make me blush.

KLARY

Dear Master, I'll leave you. We'll continue our study another time. (*Bowing*) Madame! Monsieur Darchi!

OLIVIER

I am sorry — my sister is rather abrupt and frank —

BLANCHE

Thank you!

DARCHI

Let me show you the way, Mademoiselle.

[*Darchi goes out with Klary.*

BLANCHE

Nice people you are receiving!

OLIVIER

She is a very superior woman.

BLANCHE

Superior to whom?

OLIVIER

To the others.

BLANCHE

You're very amusing.

OLIVIER

She is an artist.

BLANCHE

I have my doubts.

OLIVIER (*with a shrug*)

Much you know about it!

[*Reënter Darchi.*

BLANCHE

How do you know? At all events, I think a woman artist ought to have a fair share of womanliness. She ought to have taste and delicacy. I don't see very much taste in that dirty eccentric gown of hers, that was kept together with pins — I saw them! — and her mussy hair tied up like the hair of a Botticelli angel. I see nothing delicate in a young girl's saying that she never intends to have children. That's not frankness, it's downright cynicism. If women artists can't remain women, I think we'd much better have ordinary women with grace, modesty, and simple loving qualities — like Renée for instance — and a fig for all your temperament and refinement!

DARCHI

You're a little fool.

OLIVIER

You are hopelessly middle-class, and naturally you typify the middle-class attitude.

BLANCHE

Very well, I do belong to the middle class — and so do you, all of you. But you know, there is a way of being a decent woman, a wife and mother, *and* an artist, whether one is an aristocrat, a member of the middle or the lowest class, and that way is to preserve some of the true womanly attributes. An artist is a more sensitive and impressionable being than other people, isn't he? It is his business to interpret and exalt the beautiful feelings. Now, a woman has two great feelings — beautiful feelings: first, love in and for itself, and then, mother's love. I am madly in love with my husband and I adore my two children. Therefore, I am a truer artist than Mademoiselle Lilian; or, at any rate, I am superior to her because I find beauty in doing my duty and playing my natural rôle.

OLIVIER

Good God, what nonsense!

DARCHI

Strange what broad ideas your brother and I have, and how narrow you are!

BLANCHE

See here, papa, you're always trying to make people forget that you were once a stove-manufacturer — a decent and honorable thing to be — but I want to tell you, you've become more middle-class than ever. You pretend to tastes that you haven't got; you

pose as something you are not; and you show your "intellectual" wares as others display their goods. Your brothers make a show with the good townspeople by piling up money; you try to make a show in your way. It's the same sort of vanity, and it's a thing that's as far from a really superior man as I can imagine. Now, don't be angry. You're a good man and I love you. I can't say as much for Olivier.

OLIVIER

As if I cared!

BLANCHE

I know — you don't care about anything. Oh, I've quite forgotten little Bab in the garden. (*To Darchi*) He wanted you. I think you promised to build something for him — Grandpa! Are you coming?

DARCHI

Very well. Only you *are* a bit sharp. You don't understand —

[*They go out. Olivier walks nervously up and down. He stops in front of his desk, lights a cigarette, and then continues pacing the room. Enter Renée, right.*

OLIVIER

Renée, your behavior just now was inexcusable.

RENÉE

I asked you not to receive that woman any more.

OLIVIER

You neglected, however, to give me any good reason for refusing to do so.

RENÉE

I think you have no right to see women here whom I refuse to receive.

OLIVIER

Please, Renée, let's not have another useless argument. I refuse to give up so much good energy trying to convince you that you are inspired by absurd prejudices. I've suffered enough from them already.

RENÉE

As I suffered from many other things. During the past month — ever since our last painful discussion on the same subject, which I don't even want to remind you of — I've been trying to forget all the dreams of my girlhood. Of course, I mustn't allow anything of your outrageous treatment toward me to be seen by any one.

OLIVIER

But I can't emulate your way of living. I must live with the people of my own circle.

RENÉE

It seems to me your circle ought to be your family, your own fireside, and — I myself.

OLIVIER

No: it is the people with whom I can discuss matters that interest me, stimulate me, develop my intellectual life.

RENÉE

That is, every one except me.

OLIVIER

Is it my fault if nothing I do interests you? If you persistently refuse even to try to share my interests,

to make the slightest effort to rise above the petty trivialities of the household?

RENÉE

Do you call love and tenderness petty trivialities? I have tried to understand your aspirations, but I've not found one to take the place of love.

OLIVIER

Real love is a communion of ideas.

RENÉE

Your ideas and your words are as cold as ice.

OLIVIER

As the ideas and words of any intelligent and strong man ought to be. You see, the woman you spoke of, and with whom I enjoy a purely intellectual relationship, understands and loves those ideas and words. However, our last discussion only proved how deep our misunderstanding was, and how impossible it was to bridge the gap.

RENÉE (*proudly*)

I shouldn't think of forgetting that!

OLIVIER

And as I require the companionship of intellectual people for the sake of my own development, I simply must —

RENÉE

No, you must not, unless you want to outrage every feeling in me. I won't stand it. My intelligence — I know you don't think I have any — !

OLIVIER

Yes, I do, but you were never taught how to behave —

RENÉE

I tell you, my intelligence and my dignity refuse to bear it another instant.

[*Enter Heurtoux.*

HEURTOUX

What is it, Renée? You're so excited!

RENÉE

It's you, father? I'm glad you've come.

HEURTOUX

Why? What's the trouble?

RENÉE

I'm terribly unhappy.

HEURTOUX

Renée!

OLIVIER

Let her speak.

RENÉE

I'm a total stranger to my husband. He refuses to allow me to share his life with him. He says he belongs to a different race, and insists on receiving a woman here whom I refuse to recognize.

OLIVIER

Jealousy, you see.

RENÉE

Jealousy, no! I am not jealous, but I won't be made ridiculous. It's my pride and my dignity. You don't know that side of me. It's coming to the surface now.

HEURTOUX

Renée, please try to be calm. Olivier, she's right. What about this other woman?

OLIVIER

A painter. I talk to her about my work.

HEURTOUX

What work?

OLIVIER

I can't explain it to you: you don't understand —

HEURTOUX

Because I see no evidence of your work. It's very strange. You talk about it to every one, and they waste your time, the time you could be spending on doing it. You've been married two years, and you've never got beyond talking about your books.

OLIVIER

My dear Monsieur, this is becoming absurd. Kindly allow me to do my own work in my own way. I tell you once for all, you will never understand.

HEURTOUX

I've done a good share of work in my day.

OLIVIER

Your idea of work is a very narrow one. But when a man really respects ideas and realizes the vast importance of expression, he knows what infinite pains are required to put the ideas into definite shape. When I think, I work, and if the results of that work have not as yet become definitely formulated, they are none the less gradually accumulating, and will some day find a place in a book that will be unique of its kind, and worthy to be given to the world. Even dreams are preparation for the book. Granted

that the dreams are never used as material, the good work will not have been in vain. But you don't see this, so —

HEURTOUX

Don't worry: I see. And I understand it so well that in spite of my inferiority as a human being with human emotions, I think it's all nonsense. When you work for and by yourself, and when you dream — that's not work; real work is useful work.

OLIVIER

Useful to whom?

HEURTOUX

To everybody.

OLIVIER

Ah, real work then is what you've done all your life: manufacturing cloth and selling grain?

HEURTOUX

Not necessarily. You must contribute something useful for everybody, either materially — as I have done — or add to the beauty of the world — as you ought to do.

OLIVIER

I don't believe in the world; I don't even believe in the necessity of life — sufficiently, that is, to make the effort. I didn't accept the duty.

HEURTOUX

You've got to accept it. And with the duty goes the right. Your right is the right to live.

OLIVIER

I didn't ask for it. I did not give myself life.

HEURTOUX

You take very good care to preserve it. You accept the right but refuse to perform the duty.

OLIVIER

You're becoming very eloquent, Monsieur Heurtoux, for a — a —

HEURTOUX

Former manufacturer, eh? No, I'm not eloquent, I am simply telling you a few ideas of my own. The average man like me has very decided notions on the subject. You share in the results of other people's labor — my own, the baker's, your maid's, that of the composer of the melody you are now whistling —. You have contracted a debt. You don't realize it, and that is why you are making Renée unhappy. You see, there are certain duties that go together; work, love, parenthood; they are all contributions to life, and they are natural duties; you are bound to them merely because you exist, because you cling to life —

OLIVIER

Who says I cling to life?

HEURTOUX

Your very conduct: everything you do. Why, that empty bouillon cup on the table! The life you received you must pay for. That is why we must work for the necessities of life, that is why we are endowed with instincts to love, and to beget children. These are like the mysterious laws of compensation and equilibrium in nature. Those who haven't these instincts and who fail to understand the duties are natural monstrosities. You smile —

OLIVIER

Yes, a little. The "mysterious laws" of nature always make me smile. I refuse to allow myself to be influenced by instinct. I do not submit to nature: I analyse it.

RENÉE

Stop! Nature will take her revenge on you. You spend your time dissecting the unnatural, abnormal sensations and ideas of what you call your circle, who know nothing of nature. You shut yourselves into a stuffy little room like this, where the sun you so much fear never penetrates. (*She goes to the window at the back and opens it, pushing back the curtains. The sunlight floods the room. Trees and grass, and a lovely landscape, are seen in the distance*) Can you analyse that? Can you dissect the thrilling sensations inspired by nature? No, you must feel them and be led and dominated by them. You *must* submit to all-powerful nature, to the great and overmastering force of life. I have my pride, as you have yours. I can understand your feeling of revolt against everything that man has made and contrived, but when you revolt against Mother Nature, your struggle must end in failure. At base, I think you understand this, only you are afraid to look facts in the face; you draw the curtains! But you are playing a losing game. Nature comes to you all the same, and sooner or later she will be avenged. So far as you are concerned, your day is not far off.

OLIVIER

You, too, Renée, are waxing eloquent. You don't have to get so excited to show me the beauty of a

little landscape — a charming Corot, which I confess I admire.

RENÉE

See, you can't admire nature except at secondhand. You admire Corots, Rousseaus, and Monets, but not nature, because you think of other things when you see her.

OLIVIER

My dear, you're becoming rather tiresome. Have you anything more to say? Or you, Monsieur Heurtoux?

HEURTOUX

No, I'm looking at the landscape, which your curtains were hiding. I'm looking at Bab in the garden; Darchi is carrying him on his shoulders because he doesn't think any one is looking. Yes, I *do* think we belong to different races, but I wonder if the real intellectual, the true artist, is you who talk about the "great forces," or I, the old manufacturer, upon whom those forces are brought to bear, even though I can't analyse them.

OLIVIER

No, we are not the same, and therefore we can never understand each other. Now let us bring this discussion to a close. My education and culture have opened up too wide a gulf between us.

RENÉE

I have not finished yet. I want to ask you a simple question, and I beg you to think well before you answer. A great deal will depend on that answer, more than you imagine. Are you willing to refuse to receive that woman any more?

OLIVIER

My dear, I see no reason why I should give in to your whim.

RENÉE

Very well.

OLIVIER (*going to the door*)

Good-bye, Monsieur Heurtoux. We'll meet again when you calm down a little, and perhaps you aren't so much inclined to philosophize.

[*Olivier goes out. Renée falls into a chair.*

RENÉE

I — I want fresh air. Please open the windows. (*Heurtoux opens the windows wide. The sun is setting. The stage is gradually becoming darker*) Now it's all over!

HEURTOUX

What do you mean?

RENÉE

I mean, I feel I am absolutely free now.

HEURTOUX

But, Renée, you are a married woman! —

RENÉE

Marriage has made me unhappy. It disgusts me, and I'll have nothing more to do with it.

HEURTOUX

Renée!

RENÉE (*rising*)

Father, you don't know what I have gone through. You don't know what our marriage has been!

HEURTOUX

Yes, I do know. Your mother told me. (*Renée hides her face. Heurtoux goes to her*) Poor child! I like you better that way — ashamed, even before your father. I like to see a woman blush for some things. Poor dear child, I know how unhappy you are. Perhaps it's my fault for allowing you to marry him.

RENÉE

You mustn't blame yourself, father.

HEURTOUX

But I do. I am sorry for my short-sightedness. How many fathers there are like me who have lived decent lives as husbands and fathers, and yet seem to think a husband for their daughter must be different from what they are! They are taken in by the fine manners of a gentleman. Poor Renée, I ought to have found you a husband like myself — (*with a smile*) or as I used to be. Nothing very brilliant, but a good solid fellow, not over-subtle, but full of the love of life, with good strength and courage; a man of strong convictions, relying maybe a little too much on his emotions, but finding in them, because they are healthy, the pledge for a well-balanced and common-sense existence. You want a man nearer to nature, not so refined, but healthier and gentler, who loves you with less philosophy and more passion — the way I loved your mother — (*Renée rises as she listens to her father, and looks out the window*) and gives you children, fine healthy youngsters, like Bab. Aren't you listening, Renée?

RENÉE

Yes, yes, father, but I was looking. See, outdoors everything is echoing your words: the breeze, the rustling of the leaves, Bab's voice —

HEURTOUX

So you see, Renée, I am right in blaming myself.

[*Enter Darchi, at the back.*

DARCHI

The window open! What are you doing?

RENÉE

We were talking. Isn't Bab with you?

DARCHI

Méryac relieved me. The moment he appears on the scene, Bab forgets every one else. (*To Heurtoux*) You old emotional and impressionable Daddy, will you play a game of billiards with me? Olivier's not here: he's gone for a walk.

RENÉE

Oh!

DARCHI

Yes. (*To Heurtoux*) Are you coming?

HEURTOUX

Yes, and I want to talk to you about something.

DARCHI

You're going to lecture me, are you? If so, I'll run away.

HEURTOUX

See you soon, Renée. Kiss me.

[*Renée offers her forehead, and Heurtoux kisses it.*

DARCHI

Very touching family scene!

[*Heurtoux and Darchi go out. The stage has become quite dark. Renée goes slowly to the window, sits down, and gazes out. André and Blanche enter a moment later.*

BLANCHE

What do you want?

ANDRÉ

I want you to kiss me.

[*He kisses her face and neck.*

BLANCHE

What *is* the matter? The idea!

ANDRÉ (*kissing her again*)

This is my answer to your father's statement that no love can survive five years' married life. I can't discuss, and my lips refuse to argue — except this way.

BLANCHE

I think they're most eloquent!

ANDRÉ

Do you?

BLANCHE (*offering her lips*)

You see? I want more — arguments. (*André kisses her again*) Then you still love me?

ANDRÉ

Dear little Blanchette!

BLANCHE

Very much?

ANDRÉ

Very much.

BLANCHE

As much as at first?

ANDRÉ

More.

BLANCHE

But you said then it was impossible to love me more?

ANDRÉ

I thought so at the time, but I didn't imagine you could become more adorable than you were then. I was mistaken. I know you so much better now.

BLANCHE

You do indeed!

ANDRÉ (*with his arm around her waist*)

And you are my own wife —

BLANCHE

Of course I am, you dear!

ANDRÉ

And yet I can never know you too well. I love you, I love you so much —

BLANCHE

Stop! You mustn't profane my brother's office, the psychologist's sanctuary. Aren't you glad you aren't like him? If I had that kind of a husband, I'd have deceived him long ago.

ANDRÉ

Now I'm warned. But I don't want to be like him, so there's no danger.

BLANCHE

Then we're not old married people?

ANDRÉ

Do you think we are?

BLANCHE

And we're not going to be?

ANDRÉ

Never — even at eighty. We'll always be bride and groom. Let me kiss you again. (*Renée rises. They turn*) Sh! There's some one! Let's run!

[*They escape, without having seen Renée.*

RENÉE

How happy they are!

[*She leans against the wall near the door. Singing is heard outside. Méryac's figure is distinguished passing on the terrace. On catching sight of Renée, he stops short, then enters.*

MÉRYAC

Are you alone?

RENÉE

I was watching the sun set.

MÉRYAC

And I have been looking for you. Your husband has gone out. Your father and father-in-law are talking on the road. André and his wife have disappeared somewhere, and your mother is with Bab.— I haven't seen you for some days. Are you trying to avoid me?

RENÉE

No.

MÉRYAC

I wanted so much to see you!

RENÉE

But you're so busy. Your factory, your hunting — Weren't you out hunting this gorgeous day?

MÉRYAC

No. I don't think I'll do any more hunting at all.

RENÉE (*seated, as she looks off into the distance*)

Why not?

MÉRYAC

I feel sick about it, almost remorseful. Something happened — it was really of no consequence — a *hunter* would laugh at me.

RENÉE

What was it?

MÉRYAC

Nothing, and yet it upset me, and brought tears to my eyes. It was three days ago. You remember how beautiful it was, how the sun bathed the whole countryside — as it does to-day. Well, I started off with my dog. I was entranced with the soft summer air and intoxicated with the bright sunlight. I walked along oblivious of everything, in a dream — the one I always dream, and which I dare not tell you — I had forgotten all about hunting and lost sight of the dog. All at once I heard something run through the underbrush. I looked up, and twenty paces away I saw the dog madly pursuing a little gray mass. I don't know why I didn't raise my gun as I usually do, but somehow I was frightened and stunned. I called to the dog: "Frac! Frac, come here!" But the dog was too intent on his prey, and when I finally reached him, after a hot chase, he had already mangled the little gray mass. It was a young hare. I watched its last agony, and felt as if I were an accomplice to a murder. Strange,

it wasn't the first time I'd seen an animal die; often I finished the work myself. I have always been so excited by the shooting that I never thought of the animal itself. But this time I felt the whole death agony as I saw the helpless little body palpitate in the clover. Everything danced before my eyes; I thought that all nature was trembling at the death of the little hare. You see, there's nothing extraordinary in this stupid little tale. But I don't think I'll hunt again. I don't think I'd dare look another living creature in the face. You have made me feel that way.

RENÉE

I?

MÉRYAC

Yes, you. Ever since I saw you and loved you, I have felt a greater responsibility toward all life and a love for all creatures. When I think of you — and I always think of you! — all nature surges up in me, the whole of life. It intoxicates me.

RENÉE

I have felt that, too! I know the feeling. When I was a child, and when I was still a young girl, I used to have hallucinations — they were wonderfully beautiful — and I seemed to see the great hosts of life; they meant power and mystery to me. When you came here a few minutes ago, I felt so confused — and troubled —

MÉRYAC

Troubled? Have you been suffering again?

RENÉE

No.

MÉRYAC

Yes, you have. I can't bear to have you suffer. It's all the more intolerable in the presence of the supreme happiness of nature, that seems to cry aloud to us to thrill and be our true selves. You are so full of life, of passion, youth.

[*The sound of women's voices singing is heard more distinctly than before.*

RENÉE

It *is* wonderful! This beautiful evening! You and I can't be reasonable now. Let us go.

MÉRYAC

Are you afraid?

RENÉE (*tense*)

Yes. And I do suffer. You are right: I am young, I love life. I feel those things you spoke of. Everything draws us together; the birds' wings, the singing, the laughing children. I understand the mysterious language of nature, but I am afraid of what it will tell me. I am afraid of myself. I'm so lonely! And I am afraid of you! Let's go, let's go!

MÉRYAC (*close by her*)

Renée, you mustn't be afraid. You give me joy and confidence. Remember, you have the right to love, to give yourself freely. Nature calls you! Listen to the singing and the children! I love you, Renée, I love you!

[*He takes her in his arms.*

RENÉE (*freeing herself from his embrace*)

No, dear, no. Please! Pity me! I feel so weak — I — ! I'm not keeping anything from you, and I tell you I'm deeply troubled, because my pride has

been hurt: I feel my will-power deserting me. Aren't you satisfied? You have felt my heart beat, and you have brought me to the verge of giving myself to you. I love you. You knew it already — I don't mind admitting it. But I beg you, because I love you and because I want us to be worthy of each other, please go — leave me —

MÉRYAC

Renée, you told me you understood the language of nature! Isn't nature giving us to each other now?

RENÉE

I do understand it —

MÉRYAC

Not as I do. I must have you — I want you!

RENÉE

And I want you, but more still, I want to resist. I implore you, save me from myself. Yes, I too feel drawn to you, irresistibly. I *am* young, I have been sad and lonely, and I want to live — I *must* live. And I love you — oh, so much! Ever since you first told me you loved me, I've been struggling hard with myself. I know it's no use now. I will be yours, I must be yours, because I love you, and I want to love you. But I don't want to do anything I should regret. Not here. I don't want my happiness to spring from defeat. I want it to be victory! Later — to-morrow, perhaps — then without regret, without remorse! Not to-day. Pity me. I love you, I am yours — but not — now. Not now.

[*She turns from him in tears. The singing outside is heard coming nearer and nearer.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

The scene is the same. Heurtoux, Mme. Heurtoux, and Darchi are present.

DARCHI

But it's not my fault. Anyway, I am sure you exaggerate.

HEURTOUX

Of course, it's not your fault, my dear Darchi. But it's high time you began to look facts in the face. I tell you, we are not exaggerating.

MME. HEURTOUX

Unfortunately! If Renée doesn't seem more desperate, it's her pride. She sees you agree with Olivier in everything, and she refuses to show anything. But she is suffering. She can't stand the strain very much longer. I'm afraid it will tell on her.

HEURTOUX

That's what I said. That scene about little Lilian the other day was a fearful shock. It showed how serious the matter is becoming. I don't see any way out of it. Renée's excitement worried me as much as Olivier's indifference.

DARCHI

What do you want me to do? I'm not used to handling these sentimental affairs. But why the devil does Renée make such a fuss over Klary? The little girl is amusing — that's all.

HEURTOUX

Too amusing!

DARCHI

Grant even that Olivier is wrong. Grant it. What else has Renée to complain of? These griefs of hers are rather vague, it seems to me, a matter of impressions —

MME. HEURTOUX

My dear friend, a woman's whole happiness is a matter of impressions. Probably the greatest lack in Renée's married life is impressions. You can't leave a young wife of twenty-five in the sort of moral desert in which Olivier leaves Renée. Renée is by nature lively, affectionate, tender. He maintains he must have quiet for his intellectual development — much good it does him — and he says she disturbs him. He neglects her, that's what he does, and refuses her everything she has a right to expect. You think her griefs are vague, and that she has nothing in particular to complain of. I tell you, she is right when she declares she is not getting out of marriage what she had a perfect right to expect. She's not a real wife in any sense of the word: she can't hope to be a mother.

DARCHI

Ridiculous sentimental feminine notions! A man and his wife can't always love as they did when they were engaged!

MME. HEURTOUX

Good Heavens, my dear Darchi, you surely don't expect me, an old woman, to tell you how a husband ought to love his wife; how he can go about it to make her forget certain disagreeable things and be

happy! I was once a young wife myself, and I can tell you our married life wasn't a bit like Renée's and Olivier's. (*To her husband*) Isn't that so, dear? (*Heurtoux makes no answer, only he lightly kisses her hair*) And I rather think your own wasn't either, for that matter!

DARCHI

We belong to another generation.

HEURTOUX

There are some things that never change from one generation to another, old man. Men and women love each other nowadays as they did in the past — that is, when they really love.

MME. HEURTOUX

I knew your wife, Darchi, and I know she was very happy — don't deny it! And I know, too, that you let her have the upper hand with you.

DARCHI

Come, now, I —

MME. HEURTOUX

Yes, yes, yes. You were very much in love with her. And you had children.

DARCHI

Who've given me any amount of trouble.

MME. HEURTOUX

Whom you love all the same, and who have given you great happiness. Why, your behavior at this very moment is only the result of your admiration for Olivier. And look at Blanche, who has given you grandchildren, to whom you are a model grand-daddy — when no one is looking!

DARCHI

I haven't a heart of stone, of course —

MME. HEURTOUX

Then try to appear what you really are. You have good, simple, healthy feelings which you try your best to conceal and stifle, in order to ape your son. It reminds me of the way you hide your comfortable old Voltaire armchair in your bedroom, while you pretend to like those nasty little English things you can't sit down on!

DARCHI

Who told you that?

MME. HEURTOUX

Blanche. You see, we know you. There's no use trying to make us believe you are an advanced modern, that you've done away with all human feelings, and so on. We won't believe you.

HEURTOUX

You understand, Darchi, this is a very serious matter. Our girl is threatened with great unhappiness. And it's high time you did something.

DARCHI (*nervously*)

I?

HEURTOUX

Yes, you. You are the only one who can say certain things to Olivier. *We* couldn't. I tried yesterday, but it was useless. You could say things to him without hurting his pride.

DARCHI

I? My dear friends, I don't think so. I really am in earnest — I haven't been so serious for a long

time. What you tell me about Renée troubles me, I confess. I know I deserve a severe scolding. It's partly my own fault.

MME. HEURTOUX

No one is blaming you.

DARCHI

I think I ought to blame myself. You have changed me. I haven't really thought about myself for years. But how could it be helped? I had such confidence in Olivier's intellect. I couldn't foresee all this trouble.

HEURTOUX

But if you step in now —

DARCHI

Believe me, I want to help. But I'm sure Olivier wouldn't listen to me. You see, he's so used to having me agree with him in everything. He knows so much more than I do, and he argues better. I've become the obedient son, and he the father. Why, he'd laugh in my face — respectfully of course! Still, he'd laugh. And he'd say all sorts of fine-sounding things, and I'd understand about half of them. Of course, my answers would be ridiculous. And besides, I'm afraid he would use my own arguments against me.

HEURTOUX

You are in a bad way, Darchi!

DARCHI

It's not easy being the father of a superior man! I'm nothing but a retired manufacturer. How can I answer clever arguments? How can I confess my

ignorance? It would be too humiliating. I'd have to pretend to be superior in my own way. That's the simplest method, but it has its drawbacks. I feel that more keenly now than ever before. It hurts me to have to confess this to you. I can't help you at all.

HEURTOUX

Well, try, at least.

DARCHI

I'll try, but I haven't much hope. I'll see him at once. (*He goes toward Heurtoux*) You don't blame me, do you, Heurtoux?

HEURTOUX (*grasping his hand*)

Of course not. I feel sorry for you, as I do for ourselves.

DARCHI (*as he goes out*)

I'll try.

MME. HEURTOUX

Poor fellow!

HEURTOUX

He's beginning to see the light.

MME. HEURTOUX

He at least has Blanche. While we — I'm so afraid for Renée!

HEURTOUX

Darchi is not the only one who blames himself.

MME. HEURTOUX

What do you mean?

HEURTOUX

I mean I blame myself, too, for what has happened. It's somewhat my own fault.

MME. HEURTOUX

How do you mean, your own fault?

HEURTOUX

I ought to have known better than to give her such a husband — he was too different. That's the usual mistake of fathers like me. If we have no money to give our daughters, we marry them off to rich men, deceiving them meanwhile as to the state of our finances. If we have, then we look for a son-in-law from the upper classes, and we find out when it's too late that sincerity and hard work are the only roads to intelligence and virtue. The girl is made unhappy, and we are punished for our stupidity and pride. The punishment may be a cruel one, but it is none the less deserved.

MME. HEURTOUX

You're right. We were mistaken. And yet you and I, dear, knew how to be happy, and we loved each other. We were happy, I think, because we never tried to find out the why and how of it all. Happiness comes when you don't think too much about it. I only hope Renée won't do anything rash. I'm so afraid —

HEURTOUX

But Renée has a very strict sense of duty.

MME. HEURTOUX

Still, I'm afraid. I know her. The way she keeps things to herself — why, the strain must be terrible. Her strength and patience must be nearly at an end. And she is young and romantic, you know. She is honest and upright, of course, but she belongs to

her own generation, and if she knows her duties, she also knows her rights. I'm very much worried. When I saw her a few moments ago she was almost too calm! Especially after the scene yesterday.

[*Enter Renée.*

RENÉE

Have you seen Blanche, mother?

MME. HEURTOUX

Not long ago. She must be somewhere in the house. Come here, Renée, we want to talk with you.

RENÉE

What is it, mother?

MME. HEURTOUX

We want to know what's the matter. You are so changed. Have you had an explanation with your husband? Is everything better now?

RENÉE

No, we've had no explanation. There will be no more explanations, unless —

MME. HEURTOUX

What *is* the matter, dear? Look at me — straight in the face. (*Renée looks steadfastly at her mother*) You're so changed since yesterday. It almost seems as if your trouble had been wiped away. There is a look of joy, of victory, in your eyes —

RENÉE

I'm just calm, mother, that's all. And I have perfect control over my feelings. I'm not worrying any more. I've made an important decision. I see everything clearly now. I've found my will-power again.

MME. HEURTOUX

A decision? What?

RENÉE

Mother, please don't make me tell you now. You will know soon.

MME. HEURTOUX

What is it? Renée, are you hiding anything from me? From your father and mother? That's not right.

RENÉE

Yes, it is. You see, I'm afraid you'll both object. You made me a decent girl, and you've given me feelings. You yourselves have given me the example, only your notions of decency and uprightness are a little different from mine; they belong to different times. I do respect you, and I admire your principles, but I think I have the right not to agree with you on certain matters. I imagine you wouldn't approve of what I have decided to do. But nothing can prevent me —

HEURTOUX

Not even your father and mother, Renée?

RENÉE

No, not even you. I love you both dearly, and I should feel terribly hurt if I did something you disapproved of, but I feel that this is a matter concerning my whole future happiness. I shall soon be very happy, and so will you.

MME. HEURTOUX

Don't you see how your attitude, your silence and calmness, have hurt us already? If you behave this way, it must be a very serious matter. Your decision

must be irrevocable? You — you aren't forgetting your duties, are you, Renée?

RENÉE

What duties?

MME. HEURTOUX

As a wife, my child.

RENÉE

As a wife? I am not a wife, as you know only too well.

HEURTOUX

Your duties as a woman, then.

RENÉE

I am not even a woman! At least, so far I haven't lived the life of a real woman. What I want now is the duties of a woman!

HEURTOUX

What are you going to do, Renée? See how upset your mother is. She is afraid for you, and for us. Tell us what you've decided to do. We'll try to understand and help you, if we possibly can.

RENÉE

Forgive me, father — and you too, mother. I'm going to hurt you, I know, but I can't help it; it's inevitable, and it's absolutely necessary. That's the only sorrow I have in all my happiness. But I must tell you — if not to-day, then to-morrow.

MME. HEURTOUX (*crying*)

Renée!

RENÉE

I only want you to understand, and not blame me. You spoke of my duties as a woman. My duty as

a woman is to give all my love and be faithful to the man who loves me. Olivier does not love me.

HEURTOUX

He is your husband!

RENÉE

Do you insist that I sacrifice my whole life for that reason? For the sake of a convention? Would you ask me to drag out my life to the end, without hope? You can't ask me to do that! You wouldn't want me to! To live alone without love, me a woman of twenty-five —

MME. HEURTOUX

You are cruel, Renée. You say you would be alone. What about us?

RENÉE

You know I love you, mother. I respect you, and I adore you. I want to be like you, when I am your age. I want to look back on my life and think of it with pride, and know I have deserved my happiness. What I admire and love in you is what your life has been — how quiet and strong! — your sense of duty accomplished. I know what you have been when I see father kiss your white hair, and when I think that I am part of your love for each other. That is why I want to be like you, to the end of my life.

MME. HEURTOUX

My dear child, what are you going to do? It's a terrible thing that you can't realize your dreams, unless you do wrong by leaving your husband and going to some one else —

RENÉE

That's what I want!

HEURTOUX

And forget us!

RENÉE

I shan't forget you. I know that you suffer as I do — more, perhaps. I want a different life from now on. But I promise, you will find happiness in my happiness. I make you cry now, but soon I shall make you laugh with me. You will be happy, as you were when I was a child. That is the only real joy parents have — children — but think how wonderful it is! I want that joy too, mother! You must promise to stand by me, and take care of me. Promise; I need your support.

MME. HEURTOUX (*in tears*)

Poor darling! Do you think we'd give you up? What would our life be without you now?

RENÉE

What mine would be twenty years from now, if I failed to do what I have decided to!

HEURTOUX

But tell us —

[*Enter Olivier.*

RENÉE (*with dignity and strength*)

Now I'll tell you, mother! I have asked my husband to be present and hear my decision.

OLIVIER

Good setting! Really effective! What does it all mean?

RENÉE

I'll tell you. You remember, a month ago I told you to take care, and defend me against myself? You shrugged your shoulders. And you remember, yesterday, after I had warned you of the importance I would attach to your answer, I asked you whether you would refuse to see that woman whose presence here is an insult to me? You refused. A month ago I still hoped I might be able to bring you closer to me and make you at least behave as other men do. At that time I had no intention of doing what I have now decided on, and your answer was what urged me to take the step.

OLIVIER (*coldly*)

What step?

RENÉE

I am going away.

MME. HEURTOUX

Going away, Renée?

HEURTOUX

What!

RENÉE

I say, I am going away. Please let me finish, father.

OLIVIER (*disdainfully*)

So you are going away? See where your silly romantic ideas are taking you! My dear, do you know you have no right to do that unless you are divorced from me, and also that that divorce must first be obtained? You will find it difficult to prove anything against me.

RENÉE

I know that. But I have no intention of getting a divorce at present. That will come later. I am simply going away. If I stayed to discuss and argue, I should continue to be a slave, and that I refuse to be. I refuse too, to ask you for my right to live and love. I am taking that right now. So you see, you must free me some day. Then I shall marry and become the sort of wife you refused to let me be. That is why I am leaving.

OLIVIER (*as before*)

May I know where you are going?

RENÉE

No, but I shall tell you what I am going to do.

OLIVIER

And what pray may that be?

RENÉE

This evening I shall belong to the man I love.

MME. HEURTOUX

What are you saying! My dear child!

HEURTOUX

You don't know what you're saying!

OLIVIER

Stop it! This is my affair! This evening, you say? Are you quite sure this evening will be the first time?

RENÉE

What I am doing now ought to speak for the past, I think. I am warning you, you see, because I can't bear to lie to you or conceal anything. Because I'm not guilty. I feel sure I am acting within my

rights. I've submitted too long, waited too long for you to understand and love me as I wanted to be loved, as I have a right to be loved, and as I once loved you! I loved you with every illusion of first love. But when I began to lose hope, and when I saw that you would never really be my husband, I thought that at least you would give me a child some day — the child I so longed for, that would have purified our passion and given me something to live for, and make our useless home something beautiful and worthy. But you refused! If I can't get that sort of love and life from you, I don't want to live. I crave it with my heart, with my senses — and now I am going where I can get it. I am going away deliberately; I know perfectly well what I am doing: I am going to give myself to a man who will give me what I want. I go joyfully, because I shall take what belongs to me by right. What I want above everything else on earth is a child that will make me a better woman, obedient to the law of life that you so heartily despise!

OLIVIER

That will do! Really, this is ridiculous. You seem to forget that this is a wrong and an outrage against me! You're not the one to argue with — There's some one else to reckon with! It must be — Méryac, eh?

RENÉE

Yes.

OLIVIER

Good! I ought to have suspected it. Do you think for an instant I'll allow you to go off that way, just

because you want full liberty for your love affairs? I know very well that this isn't the first time —

RENÉE

You lie!

OLIVIER

That's enough!

RENÉE

I am not afraid of you. I am going to do what I said I would. How can you stop me? Supposing you do to-day, what about to-morrow? You can't lock me up.

OLIVIER

I'll settle that with your lover.

RENÉE

I hardly think so. He won't risk his life fighting you. Your life is useless, his belongs to me.

OLIVIER

Oh, he's a coward, then!

RENÉE

Do you dare speak of cowardice? You make me smile. You are afraid of life; you are afraid to assume its duties and responsibilities.

HEURTOUX

Renée, calm yourself. Think of us!

OLIVIER

Why, it's all your fault. See where those damned sentimental notions are leading her! Thrown her into the arms of the first good-looking male she meets. I ought to have known that a woman brought up by such parents was not the wife for an artist. I could never hope to bring her up to my level —

HEURTOUX

If you had been a real artist, I don't think things would have come to this pass. I don't approve of what Renée is doing, but I advise you not to call yourself an artist. All you do is to muddle everything up with words; every impression you receive is from a book or a picture; your eyes can't bear direct sunlight; you deform and pervert nature by your everlasting analysis; you deny the great laws of life and try to formulate rules for love itself. Do you really think you are the artist? Is it not rather Renée? She gives herself up — maybe a little too readily — to the marvelous beauty of life; she lets nature breathe the sweetness of life into her veins; she allows her healthy instincts free play. She thrills with life, and laughs and cries at God's handiwork, which you try to analyse and describe and formulate. You never feel a true emotion, or shed a tear — Look at you now, for instance! I repeat, I don't approve of Renée, but I understand!

OLIVIER

Let's cut this discussion short. Let her go. After all, I shall be freer than she. And, besides, my pride wouldn't allow me to hold her by force. After everything she just said, I don't want to see her again. I leave her to the animal who wants her. Perhaps I'll have a little peace and quiet now. I've wasted too much time and energy on an ignorant and unsympathetic woman.

[*He goes out.*

RENÉE (*excitedly*)

I'm free now! (*She goes to her parents, with tears*

in her eyes) Don't cry, father! Mother, don't blame me! And don't be sad. I'm going to be so happy! Look out there, see the country, and the sky, and the sunlight! They are all calling to me. Everything is waiting for me. You taught me to love those things, didn't you? I belong to them, I'm part of them, because I am a woman, a human being. And I'm going to be everything that a woman should be! Don't cry, mother!

HEURTOUX

Well, I don't think —

RENÉE

Don't argue with me, father! Let me go now. I feel I must obey the highest of all laws!

CURTAIN

PROGRESS

(*Les Étapes*)

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

Les Étapes was first performed at the Théâtre du Parc, Brussels, in 1907.

Persons in the play:

DOCTOR THÉRAT
DOCTOR LEGLAY, his son-in-law
VANNAIRE
EDMOND, Leglay's son
A Man Patient
A Servant
MADELEINE, Thérat's daughter
MADAME THÉRAT
A Woman Patient

The scene is in two different rooms in Thérat's home, presumably in a large Belgian city. The time is the present.

PROGRESS

ACT I

Doctor Leglay's consulting office. This room connects with the drawing-room by a large doorway, which is open. The furnishings are severe: bookcases, a desk, and a table with surgical instruments. As the curtain rises, Doctor Thérat is seated, his wife facing him. Leglay and Vannaire are nearby.

MME. THÉRAT (*to her husband*)

You must rest; you may, now that Paul is working with you.

VANNAIRE

Your wife is right: you must rest.

THÉRAT

I don't intend to let Paul do all the work by himself.

LEGLAY

You know I am quite ready to do that, master.

THÉRAT

I know, and I thank you. But it would not be right; it wouldn't be fitting.

MME. THÉRAT (*interrupting*)

No, it wouldn't be right or fitting if Paul were an ordinary assistant or a total stranger; but your son-in-law, practically your son!

LEGLAY

Of course. But I should be only too glad if I were able —

THÉRAT

For my part, I should be sorry. (*To Leglay*) You ought to understand. You cannot forsake science after having devoted your life to it. It yields us such glorious returns. Only this morning I operated on a woman — a poor creature, she would have interested you, Vannaire: splendid case for a novelist. She was a young mother, abandoned — death staring her in the face, and the possibility of leaving a helpless orphan. (*He rises, and speaks proudly*) I saved her. That gives me more joy, a juster reason to be proud than anything else; it gives me more genuine pleasure than I could have from any amount of rest. At such times we love our profession passionately — when we work, secretly, to preserve a spark of life in a being we do not know, who was the day before merely indifferent to us, a human being from whom we had absolutely nothing to expect. That being pays us nothing, and perhaps will never suspect the danger from which we have saved him. At a time like that we do not sell our power: we make a present of it. Our only fee is the satisfaction of realizing what we have accomplished.

VANNAIRE

That must be splendid — the finest sort of work!

MME. THÉRAT

But you mustn't kill yourself with work. A time comes when you have given all you have to give, and work is over.

THÉRAT

Work is never over: does death rest?

MME. THÉRAT

But you surely have a right to think a little of yourself! (*Bitterly*) The finest sort of work! It's the most thankless sort of work! There is Thérat, after forty years of the hardest sort of work — he's not rich!

THÉRAT (*quietly*)

We do not need wealth, Nanine. We live comfortably.

MME. THÉRAT

Or if you'd had the glory you deserved for all your work and your discoveries — ! (*With a touch of bitterness*) Except for your connection with the Academy of Medicine — why, a tenor is better rewarded! It's all a grand swindle!

THÉRAT

What of it? The scientist does not labor for himself, his reputation, or his fortune. He works for the best that is in him, to add his mite to the store of human knowledge that has been handed down to him by those who have gone before. He gives himself to the great nameless masses of mankind, whom he does not know. It is a crime if he refuses to relieve suffering — that is, if he is able. We ask nothing from the unknown man who falls, and whom we must help. We do not think of the energy we spend in helping him; we go to work instinctively, because the sight of evil which can be cured is intolerable to us. (*With a change in manner, he says playfully*) Then, what do you expect of me? Do I seem old and decrepit? Never fear, Nanine,

never fear; I am not so old! Come, now, see whether everything is in order in my office. It is nearly time for the consultation. Are you going to stay, Vannaire?

VANNAIRE

Only a moment.

THÉRAT

Shall we see you this evening?

VANNAIRE

Yes.

THÉRAT

You won't need me, Leglay, will you? You don't anticipate any complication?

LEGLAY

I don't think so — no, I hardly think so.

THÉRAT

See you later.

[*Thérat goes out with his wife.*

LEGLAY

Did you hear? He gives me advice on how to conduct myself! The scientist's personality matters nothing; his desire for glory is nothing in comparison with the accomplishment of his mission. He doesn't work for himself, but for mankind. He must seek the truth, and trouble his mind about nothing else. — I look up to Thérat as my master; he gave me his daughter; I admire him as a scientist and love him as a father. I admire his enthusiasm, and his high sense of duty. He has given me respect, a sense of fidelity toward my work, and *I* have acted according to his ideals. But Thérat is mistaken:

the very nobility of his passion has led him to formulate and apply laws which are too rigid and narrow. Can I blind myself to reason, can I give the lie to that very science which he has taught me, to my conscience, which he has so jealously guarded? Well, it is the same thing over again: who ever discovered a truth that did not contain in it somewhere an error? Was there ever a genius so perfect that he could escape correction at the hands of posterity?

VANNAIRE

Yes, yes, I know. From my own experience, I know, because I am not a genius.

LEGLAY

You? But you are famous. Your novels — ?

VANNAIRE

Famous — and disillusioned. You still have that beautiful faith which gives happiness to others, and torture to you who possess it. I am afraid the same disillusion will come to you later on.

LEGLAY

Very well, if it is a necessary preparation for the future.

VANNAIRE

Unfortunately, it spoils the present. No one but a fool enjoys fame. If you are not a fool, then you will be saddened by the thought that you can foresee, almost to the minute, when your fame will vanish. But that makes little difference. You cannot choose your destiny. For my part, I took up writing, because I always believed that thoughts, however slight, were far too serious and too sacred to be formulated

without a great deal of reflection. A serious word, spoken without premeditation, is an evil action.

LEGLAY

Every one respects and admires you.

VANNAIRE

At fifty I have acquired a certain notoriety, thanks to twenty-five years of ceaseless labor, of feverish effort, directed toward the expression of moral beauty which I believed, and still believe, capable of some little inspiration to the souls of my fellow men. I spent those twenty-five years in poverty, consistently refusing to write useless or harmful books, the sort that would have afforded me quick and easy success. I was looked down upon by the successful, and at last, scarcely had I managed to gain a little respect for my work, when the younger generation, whom I loved and in whom I had great hopes, treated me as a ridiculous enemy. They gave me no respite, not even a few years — between the hostility of the older and the younger generations — in which to experience the joy of having revealed even a little beauty and given aid to humanity. They might at least wait until we are dead before demolishing our statues.

LEGLAY

It was cruel of them, I admit. But has one the right *not* to be? I have often tortured myself with the same question. I love Thérat, I admire his work, I should like nothing better than to see him end his days in glory — a glory which he deserves. But I know, I am positive, you see, that he is mistaken —

VANNAIRE

Can't you wait until he is no longer with us? Until Madeleine no longer stands between you both?

LEGLAY

Do you think I have the right, in order to spare those who are dear to me and for my own peace of mind, to keep silent, and thereby condemn people who might otherwise live?

VANNAIRE (*slowly*)

Are you sure you are right?

LEGLAY (*excitedly*)

Am I sure? I am as sure of the truth as if I held it here, tight in my hand, just as I hold the lives of people it will save!

VANNAIRE (*thoughtfully, as he looks straight at Leglay*)

Thérat spoke to me with just that confidence, thirty years ago.

LEGLAY

I know. He thought he was right, but he was overconfident. He thought he knew the whole truth.

VANNAIRE

And now you think you do.

LEGLAY

My truth is the result of his error, which I have studied. But what difference does it make? I believe! When a man believes, he must proclaim his belief from the house-tops. I feel I must sow my knowledge everywhere among men. It will bear fruit. If I kept it to myself, it would become sterile and die.

VANNAIRE

But if the germ itself is an error?

LEGLAY

Every error needs only to be confronted by the truth, and it will be corrected. But to keep the truth to yourself, and say nothing about the error, is the act of an accomplice. And besides, one can benefit mankind by dragging an error to light and destroying it. But I tell you, I am sure! There is no possible room for doubt. What I maintain is based upon all the laws of life. If I could only explain —

VANNAIRE

No, no, Leglay. I am not a scientist, and I shouldn't understand. And then — I might be obliged to agree with you. I probably should. And that would seem a little like betraying an old friend. I feel certain I should take sides with you, and that would mean that I should be false to my generation, which admires Thérat —

LEGLAY

No more than I do. Why can't we change our ideas, and cast aside our errors? Why can we not turn over a new leaf, improve ourselves, carry on the work we have begun?

VANNAIRE

Impossible, my friend. The men who make it possible for others to reach the goal of beauty and truth which they themselves have discovered, are incapable of making that beauty and truth triumph. *Their* passion was too jealous to allow the rest. A man never notices the gradual aging of a woman

whom he loves; he does not wish to have her young again, for he has grown old along with her, and can no longer supply any but the comparatively small demands she makes upon him.

LEGLAY

And for that reason the young must be energetic; if they are not, they stagnate.

VANNAIRE

Of course, of course. I don't blame you, Leglay. But I am sorry for Thérat, and for you, and for Madeleine. You are facing a terrific struggle. I did what you asked of me; I took chances and just mentioned certain books, certain articles touching upon methods opposed to his own. He was at once deeply agitated, and became almost severe; he was bitter, and lost his temper when he spoke of the younger men, their self-sufficiency, their prejudice, their lack of disinterestedness. He behaved exactly as I thought he would. It was quite impossible to argue with him.

LEGLAY

Oh! (*A pause*) Would he discuss any points at all?

VANNAIRE

Oh, yes, only I didn't understand very much of what he said: therapeutics, and so on; it was all too far from the field of a poor cynical psychologist. Have you spoken to Madeleine yet?

LEGLAY

Yes.

VANNAIRE

Well?

LEGLAY

She was as upset as he, and as firm in her ideas.

VANNAIRE

She defends her father.

LEGLAY

Whom, by the way, I am not attacking; I am merely trying to complete the work he has begun. Unfortunately, she understands something of that work. If she were absolutely ignorant, she would stand between her affection for her father and her love for me, and her love for me — she adores me — would win out. But she knows a little, and she agrees with her father. Women cling to what they know with the more egotistical tenacity, because they so rarely know. If my Madeleine knew nothing, she would blindly believe in the ability of the man she loves!

VANNAIRE

If she had been that sort of woman, you would not have loved her.

LEGLAY

That's probably true. And yet her very intelligence and culture now rise up and form a barrier between us.

[*Enter a Servant.*

SERVANT

Monsieur, the gentleman who comes every Tuesday is here.

LEGLAY (*quickly*)

He's here? Show him in at once. (*The servant goes out, and Leglay walks toward the large door*) Excuse

me, please, Vannaire. Please stay; I shan't be long — not more than a moment. (*He goes into the drawing-room, and returns shortly after with a man, whom he leads to the window*) How are you?

THE PATIENT

I'm better, Doctor; I'm sure I'm better. There's less irritation.

LEGLAY

The cough?

THE PATIENT

Not so bad.

LEGLAY (*joyfully*)

Good! Healthy color in the cheeks, too. I was anxious to know at once. Now, will you wait a few moments for me? (*He conducts the Patient back into the adjoining room*) I'll ask you to come in again shortly, and we'll fix you up. Good. Just a few minutes, eh? And then we'll —

[*Leglay closes the door as soon as the Patient leaves.*

LEGLAY

You see my situation now. That man came to me with a bad case of tubercular ulcer. He is still ill, but vastly improved since I took hold of him. I am delighted to see signs of life again in his eyes. But I must hide him — this man whose life I am saving — from my father-in-law; I must be careful not to refer to him, because Thérat must not take my patient from me. He mustn't touch him; I want to take care of him myself. If Thérat knew, he might decide that an operation was necessary, and he would be acting from noble and disinterested

motives. Now, such an operation would not kill the patient, and it would undoubtedly remove the cause of his suffering, but it would be disastrous all the same, because it might easily give cause to other evils, not so easily remedied. So you see I must treat my man in secret. I am continually afraid that my father-in-law will catch sight of him. Of course, this one patient is nothing: there are others, whom he does know of. Every day they come with the fullest confidence and ask us to save their lives. I can't choose my own means, I must take anything that comes to hand that might help them. Even now there are patients waiting. Now is when they come. At this hour every day I suffer agonies; every time the bell rings it is like an appeal to my conscience, my tortured conscience.

VANNAIRE

You are not doing wrong.

LEGLAY

I am not doing all the good I might. (*After a pause, passing his hand over his brow*) Well, I shall see whether there is still some way of doing my duty, and allowing those who are dear to me to live in peace. It is a very difficult matter.

[*As he speaks, he fills a syringe with a fluid and lays it on the desk.*

VANNAIRE

Good-by, Leglay. I'll see you later.

LEGLAY

Good-by, and thank you.

VANNAIRE

I'm afraid I haven't given you much encouragement.

LEGLAY

That was not your fault. Your good-will is enough; you might have been against me, you know. You are an old friend of Thérat's, and you might have thought —

VANNAIRE

I think nothing. I only know that you are both very firm in your convictions, and I have no idea which of you is right. But it would be only natural that you should formulate your truth after Thérat had made a practical application of his. I am just trying to break the shock. Good day.

LEGLAY (*accompanying him to the door*)

Thank you once more. To-night, then.

VANNAIRE

Yes.

[*He goes out. Leglay goes impatiently to the door of the drawing-room, opens it, but starts back in surprise as Thérat appears, followed by the Patient.*

LEGLAY

Oh, it's you!

THÉRAT

Yes, I have just examined Monsieur. (*To the Patient*) Come back to-morrow.

LEGLAY (*in consternation*)

But I was going to —

THÉRAT (*with authority*)

He will return to-morrow. (*To the Patient*) We shall take care of you.

[*He rings.*

LEGLAY (*calmly*)

Very well. Will you come back to-morrow? (*Leglay conducts the Patient to the door*) To-morrow, then.

THE PATIENT

Yes, Doctor. (*Fearfully*) You don't think it will be necessary to — ?

LEGLAY

Don't worry. Everything is all right. We shall continue the treatment.

[*The Patient goes out. Leglay returns to Thérat, scrutinizing him but saying nothing.*

THÉRAT (*calmly*)

We shall operate on that man the day after to-morrow.

LEGLAY

Master!

THÉRAT (*impassively*)

Yes?

LEGLAY

But — but — it is not necessary.

THÉRAT

Tubercular ulcer: it *is* necessary. How could you have failed to notice it? He must be operated upon at once.

LEGLAY (*resolutely*)

I promise to cure him without the operation.

THÉRAT (*picking up the syringe and flinging it away*)

With that?

LEGLAY

With that — and other things.

THÉRAT

First of all, what's in that thing?

LEGLAY

A composition I've been experimenting with.

THÉRAT

And of which you have told me nothing.

LEGLAY

I was afraid you wouldn't believe in it.

THÉRAT

And why did you never mention this man to me? He told me you had been treating him for the past three months?

LEGLAY

I thought you would consider an operation necessary.

THÉRAT

Ah? You are right. As a matter of fact, I think it is. He must be operated upon immediately.

LEGLAY

Please let me treat him. I am sure of what I am doing.

THÉRAT (*proudly*)

And what about me? You think I am not sure? When you learn your mistake, it will be too late.

LEGLAY

I am not making a mistake. I have cured many others the same way.

THÉRAT

Without taking me into your confidence, of course! You seem to forget that you are working for me, and are responsible to me. I tell you there is danger, grave and imminent danger, unless we operate, and operate we will.

LEGLAY

Impossible.

THÉRAT (*angrily*)

What!

LEGLAY

Please, master — father, listen to me: I shouldn't think of opposing my will to yours. If I thought your help was indispensable, I should have brought this patient to you, in all humility. But an operation is not necessary: there is another way of curing him. He is improving already.

THÉRAT

But you know it's not a dangerous operation?

LEGLAY

No operation is without danger.

THÉRAT (*bitterly*)

I see: you've been reading some new dissertation. I really think you belong to the opposition.

LEGLAY

Against you? No. You know very well I don't. I am just one of those who wish to supplement your work, and with all due respect complete your experiments.

THÉRAT

Destroy, rather! I am defending my methods and ideas. I have arrived at my beliefs only after an enormous amount of work. That man will be operated upon because I judge an operation necessary.

LEGLAY

No, no, no. I won't have it. He is mine, do you understand, mine! His life has been in my hands for

the past three months; little by little, I have built him up, strengthened him, made him a new man. For three months I have watched anxiously over him, and seen him revive. Three months ago you might have had a right to decide: his life was his own to dispose of. But to-day it belongs to me as well, because of what I have added to it since I first took him. You may not touch him, you have no right to cut into the living flesh which I have built up. I can't allow you to, and I won't! It isn't my pride, it is my instinct that forces me to do this. (*In a low determined tone*) You know that instinct of preservation in all of us: it seems to stretch forth arms, and clutch at others —

THÉRAT (*troubled*)

But what are you afraid of? Did you ever know an operation of this sort to prove fatal?

LEGLAY

Fatal, no. But I have seen what is just as serious — more serious —

THÉRAT

Really?

LEGLAY

Yes. Do you remember that woman, the one you operated on two days before my wedding?

THÉRAT

She is still alive, is she not?

LEGLAY

Yes, she is alive. But I watched her case, because even at that time I had begun to doubt. She is condemned to live a wounded, mutilated creature, half-dead.

THÉRAT

Without me she would have died.

LEGLAY

No: we should have cured her.

THÉRAT

Cured her? (*Sarcastically*) You, perhaps?

LEGLAY

With your help, if you had consented to assist me; or without it, if you had allowed me a free hand.

THÉRAT

How much time would you have required?

LEGLAY

I don't know — it makes little difference. But I would have restored life to a whole creature. Now she is atrophied, joyless, without ambition, a mother without strength and energy.

THÉRAT (*troubled*)

Do you think that was my fault? You were present with me. I did not touch a single organ that was indispensable.

LEGLAY

What do we know about that? Merely because we don't know the function of an organ, and are unable to determine what it is used for, we conclude, most unwarrantably, that it is useless. And in the name of a science that is still only feeling its way, that is full of mystery, which is every day subject to modification of some sort, we commit irreparable blunders, cut away some part of the human mechanism which is *not* superfluous, because nature has created it. We don't know why it is there: therefore it is

good for nothing! We are like peasants who burn a Titian because we know nothing of art.

THÉRAT

There is a lesson there, to be sure.

LEGLAY

No, no. Excuse me, if I am too excited. I am afraid, I tell you, and I frankly confess the agony I feel. I don't mean to offend you, I want only to tell you that I am afraid: for mankind, for you, for your reputation —

THÉRAT

Which you now wish to shatter — you whom I made what you are — a scientist, and my own son!

LEGLAY

But I am trying to save your reputation. Oh, I want so much to convince you! You know how much I admire you. I don't want you to risk damaging the reputation you have worked so hard to earn — merely by obstinacy. And besides, I have no right to think of you, or myself.

THÉRAT

Yourself, perhaps! I am fifty years old; I have behind me thirty years of work and experience, and I am in a way your father. My pride, my name — and Madeleine's, too — ought to be sacred to you.

LEGLAY

You taught me to believe that as individuals we did not exist, that we did not work for ourselves, but for all mankind. In the struggles with my conscience, when I think of you, your face disappears and I

seem to see other faces, innumerable faces, stretching far off into the distance — into the future; and men, women, children rise up, suffering, afraid, begging for help. And I tremble —

THÉRAT (*triumphantly*)

You tremble? Send them to me!

LEGLAY

No.

THÉRAT

Send them to me! And don't worry. Let me bring comfort and assurance to your multitudes, by showing them my assurance. I have about me a whole legion of human beings — men and women — who came tottering to me, more dead than alive. I have kept off death with the clean, sharp edge of my knife, held tight in my hand. Let me show your restless multitude men who would have been dead twenty years ago but for my help. I can look upon them with pride and calm assurance. I have re-created them, made them over, by the sure skill of my hand, the quickness and accuracy of my eye. Show that to your multitude, and tell it that my hand is still sure and my mind clear. You need no longer be afraid!

[*Enter Madeleine.*

Ah, Madeleine, it's you? Come —

[*Madeleine looks anxiously at the two men.*

LEGLAY (*nervously*)

Madeleine!

MADELEINE

What is it?

LEGLAY

Don't stay here!

THÉRAT

You must stay — by all means. She must hear what you think of her father, and what you intend to do. She will judge!

LEGLAY

Please be calm! Madeleine, you know what I think of your father. I am only asking him to listen to me, as a teacher listens to the respectful objections of his pupil. His work deserves the greatest admiration, but I believe that in certain cases, there is another way of proceeding —

THÉRAT

A *better* way, eh? How modest of you! You have been able to discover in a few years what thirty years of research and work have not revealed to me! (*To Madeleine*) You hear?

MADELEINE

Father, you must not get so excited.

LEGLAY

I have benefited by your work. Your knowledge helped me, reënforced me. Thanks to you, I began where you had left off. You accomplished one stage in the evolution. You made your researches in your own field, and discovered all there was to discover. I have looked elsewhere: I have noticed that life has infinite resources, that it has furnished us weapons with which to fight disease; a whole mass of defenders which we must call upon for aid. Now, this serum —

THÉRAT

Will not restore a single organ or replace a decayed tissue!

LEGLAY

It will arrest the course of the disease without taking anything from the system.

THÉRAT

Always?

LEGLAY

Often. But when there is the least possibility, you must —

THÉRAT

So you're advising me! I see. I see that you, my son, are trying to throw me, my thoughts, my work, my discoveries, into the scrap-heap — and with the very weapons I have trained you to use! Very well, I can't prevent you. I suppose it's only natural for the young to crowd the old out of the way. You want room —

LEGLAY

Oh, master!

MADELEINE

Father, you don't think — ? Paul may be mistaken —

LEGLAY (*sadly*)

I am not mistaken.

THÉRAT

I can defend myself, I can prove I'm not yet ready to be laid on the shelf. And I don't need help, not even yours. The ungrateful future is just a little too much in a hurry.

[*Madeleine sinks into a chair.*

LEGLAY

If you were willing to discuss the matter calmly, I should be glad to tell —

THÉRAT

We shall discuss it when you know as much as I do.

LEGLAY (*discouraged*)

Then we shall never discuss it. The younger and the older generations can never sincerely, peacefully, compare their convictions, their discoveries, and their consciences. The older will always say to the younger, after having taught him all he knew: "You are too young, you don't know — "

THÉRAT

And the other insinuates: "You are too old, and you no longer know." Nor is it the younger who suffers.

LEGLAY

Master, you don't doubt my good faith, do you? I believe sincerely in what I maintain. I believe that if you modified your methods, restricted the application of them in a simple way, science and mankind would gain immeasurably. And you sincerely believe that I ought to be silent, for your sake, for the sake of my future.

THÉRAT

For *my* sake! I ask nothing of you. I maintain that you are presumptuous, and that your presumption blinds you. I am ready to defend my science against your theories. That is all.

LEGLAY

So we are — ?

THÉRAT

Adversaries, yes. You wished it.

MADELEINE (*rising*)

Oh!

LEGLAY

And we — ?

THÉRAT

Shall separate — of course.

MADELEINE (*terrified*)

Father! Father!

[*She falls into the chair again, her face buried in her hands.*

LEGLAY (*looking at his wife*)

Madeleine?

THÉRAT (*with an effort*)

Madeleine! She will tell you.

[*He goes toward the door.*

LEGLAY (*taking a step toward him*)

Master, won't you — ?

THÉRAT (*turning to him coldly*)

What?

LEGLAY (*after a moment's hesitation*)

Very well.

[*Thérat goes out. For a few moments Leglay and Madeleine say nothing.*

MADELEINE (*crying*)

Why did you tell him?

LEGLAY

I had to.

MADELEINE

You promised me you would wait.

LEGLAY

I did wait. I have been waiting for months, as you know, and I've been tortured. And I would have continued to wait, but your father happened to see one of my patients, and insisted that I should act on his advice. I couldn't allow that. It would not be right.

MADELEINE

Is it any more right to drive him to despair, and make his last years bitter? You honor him, you love him — or at least you did?

LEGLAY

I still love him, and I admire him, too.

MADELEINE

When you love people, you believe as they do, and don't make them suffer.

LEGLAY

There are duties that are above respect and above affection.

MADELEINE

Toward whom? Toward people you don't know. You are sacrificing my father for total strangers, sacrificing me, too —

LEGLAY

You, Madeleine? Don't say that! I have thought of no one but you for ever so long. If it hadn't been for you, and for the child you are going to bear, I should have acted according to my conscience long ago. That is the only reason why I have not gone ahead: because you don't believe in me, because I have not been able to convince you. I wanted to

go on, with your approval, yours above all. You're torturing me now —

MADELEINE

I believe what my father has taught me. I believe in his uprightness, and in his reputation as a scientist. I grew up while he was making that reputation, and it shaped my heart and my reason. Do you ask me to forget all that? Forget how passionately, how lovingly he guarded and watched over me, so that a little of his glory might be reflected upon me? Now for the first time, you wish that glory to weigh a little heavy on him, and you ask his daughter to turn from him. I couldn't! I am too much afraid of being ungrateful.

LEGLAY

Are you not rather afraid of being selfish? You are not afraid to ask me to sacrifice not only the pride but the very lives of hundreds, perhaps thousands, for the peace of mind of those who are dear to you?

MADELEINE

I ask nothing of them! I owe them nothing. My father has already sacrificed too much to a world that is of no interest to me, and of which I know nothing. I care about the happiness of those to whom I owe something.

LEGLAY (*protesting*)

Madeleine!

MADELEINE

I care nothing about the others. I don't need them.

LEGLAY (*irritated*)

Do you think so? Still, the moment anything goes wrong, you are the first to appeal to science, that very

science which has been so slow in its formation, through centuries of human effort. Can you live without taking into account your duties toward those who are unknown to you? You can, of course, but only if you blind yourself to all they have done, all they have taught you. You can, but you will have to live in a cave, clothe yourself in the skins of beasts, eat what I can kill, asking no help of me to bring your child into the world, a child whom you cannot teach to read — because that is only done with the aid of books, books written by men you don't know!

MADELEINE (*crying*)

Paul, you are brutal!

LEGLAY

What you say is abominable; it wounds me. It does not sound as if it came from your generous self — from your intelligence: you can't really think it. The truth is, you do not believe in me. You don't hesitate a moment between what your father says, and what I say.

MADELEINE

You forget that I, too, know —

LEGLAY

You don't want to know anything except what your father has taught you. You shut your eyes to everything else.

MADELEINE

Yes, I know I am ignorant. This is not the first time I have felt that you despised my intellect.

LEGLAY

You ignorant? Unfortunately, you are not.

MADELEINE

You wish I were, in order that I might always agree with you. A woman ought to be merely a complacent bedfellow and nothing else. Oh, yes. She oughtn't to have ideas of her own; she ought never to judge. She is created only to be loved, and to follow her husband. That is your ideal!

LEGLAY

My ideal is — *was* — a love that should unite two thoughts as intimately as —

MADELEINE

As the one is willing to give in to the other!

LEGLAY

If that dream is impossible, if the brain is to be considered more important than the heart, if intellect insists upon rebelling against love —

MADELEINE

Love! A fine sort of love that insists on submission to everything, that would force me to be ungrateful!

LEGLAY

Madeleine, let's not say things we shall regret.

MADELEINE

Let us say what we think. Let us not be false to our reason, and make believe that we love each other! You love only my body.

LEGLAY

You say I don't love you! (*He seizes her hands violently*) I don't love you? We don't love each other? Madeleine, remember, think of those wonderful days — of madness, folly — !

MADELEINE

I won't! I don't want to remember them. That was a time when instinct had the upper hand. For the rest of our lives we ought to forget.

LEGLAY

No, they were beautiful days, which ought to make us forget the cares of life, free us from the weight of thoughts, and render us two irresponsible beings serenely at one with each other.

MADELEINE (*tearing herself away from him*)

No, no! I don't want to think of that! It leads to base weakness! I don't want to be a vile plaything, an instrument of unthinking pleasure! That is not love! We don't think the same way, you and I. We don't love each other any longer.

LEGLAY

You can't believe that!

MADELEINE

I certainly cannot love any one who insults a man I admire and worship, who sacrifices everything to foolish pride, possibly interest —

LEGLAY

Madeleine, I forbid you!

MADELEINE

What! You can't forbid me anything.

LEGLAY

No, I don't want to, but you can't talk that way to me. Think, think of what binds us together, think of the child you are going to give me, of the hope and confidence with which we created it. Madeleine, don't let your pride destroy all our happiness. You and I are sincere, loyal human beings. Suppose we

don't agree? Very well, but we have the same ideals; our eyes are lit by the same flame. Look — (*He takes her hands and draws her toward him*) Look into my eyes; you see truth there — I read it in yours. Now you dare not tell me we no longer love each other. My wife! You *are* my wife, you will remain my wife; you aren't the sort of person to whom memories mean nothing. Ours are so profound, Madeleine, they raise us so far above our thoughts, our foolish pride! Look at me. (*Almost unconsciously, Madeleine softens, and allows herself to be drawn into his embrace*) You aren't against me, are you? You are not my enemy?

MADELEINE

But, father — ?

LEGLAY

You are not against him, either. On the contrary, you will be a link, a strong link between us, and perhaps some day you will succeed in bringing us together. You, Madeleine, are the future, you will bring us the future. For the child's sake, the quarrels of the past and the present must be forgotten. Everything will quiet down, you will see. We *do* love each other, don't we? You will stay with me? Won't you?

[*Madeleine does not answer, but she softly responds to his embrace. He is about to kiss her, when Madame Thérat appears in the doorway, in terror.*

MME. THÉRAT

Madeleine! Paul!

MADELEINE

What is it?

MME. THÉRAT

Your father!

MADELEINE

What is it?

MME. THÉRAT

He's ill — fainted! I don't know — Come quick!

MADELEINE

Oh! (*Turns to Paul*) You see?

[*They both rush to the door. At the same moment, Thérat appears, pale, gaunt, and proud.*

THÉRAT

It's nothing, Nanine, nothing — a little dizziness — nothing at all. (*Looking at Leglay*) I'm still hale and hearty. Well, have you decided anything? (*Leglay does not reply. Thérat turns to Madeleine, sorrowfully*) Madeleine, Madeleine!

MME. THÉRAT

What do you mean?

THÉRAT

Madeleine!

MADELEINE (*going toward him, sobbing*)

Father! Oh, father, I am with you, I am with you!

LEGLAY (*crying out*)

Madeleine!

[*He stops himself with an effort.*

THÉRAT

And you?

LEGLAY (*after a pause*)

I? (*Gazing for a long while at Madeleine*) I — I have no longer the right to stay with you. I — I am going.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is the same. Madeleine and Vannaire are present. Both have aged considerably, though Madeleine, who is only thirty, possesses a sad yet striking beauty.

MADELEINE (*seated*)

Oh, it's to-day! Very well. I had forgotten. You know, these visits are very painful to me.

VANNAIRE

But, Madeleine, what Leglay asked was the very least of what he had a right to expect. Remember, he is not separated from his wife and child by even a divorce decree! Since the child was born seven years ago he has come to see him only once a month.

MADELEINE

You know how painful it is to know he is in this house, the house of my father, whom he has caused to suffer.

VANNAIRE

You know very well he suffers, too. You must admit he has been most dignified — not to say stoical. During this separation, which has lasted nearly eight years, he might unconsciously have come to hate you and gone to law: you know the law gives him certain rights. Remember, he was not guilty toward you. He lives in silence, away from the child whom he has a right to take from you.

MADELEINE (*quickly*)

Oh —

VANNAIRE

He might; there's no doubt about that. He consents to live away from that child and from a woman who loves him.

MADELEINE

Please, Vannaire! You know I don't want to hear such things. For the past eight years my father has been suffering from a malady of which Paul is the sole cause.

VANNAIRE

That was not Leglay's fault; it's the fault of the age, of new scientific discoveries. Listen to me, my dear Madeleine, I've been wanting to ask you this question for some time. Suppose Leglay had said nothing, in spite of his conviction — which was known to you — could you have been absolutely happy? Would you not have despised him — in a way?

MADELEINE

If I were positive that he knew the truth, but I am not.

VANNAIRE

Madeleine, you must admit — I assure you that at my age, and I'm well on in years, I can't confess without a little bitterness — that you and my poor friend Thérat are the only ones who do not feel that Leglay is right.

MADELEINE

I refuse to believe until my father tells me I must, until he himself believes. I'll never forget the cause of this illness that's killing him. You wonder

at my firmness, but think, for the past eight years, I have watched my father growing older, a victim of the shock he received that day. If I were ever to weaken toward my husband, I should have only to look at my poor dear father. That gives me renewed energy. Don't you see how he has aged and suffered?

VANNAIRE

Oh, yes, yes. He is one of the victims of the cruel and necessary progress of thought. But he is not the only one: there is you yourself, the child, and Leglay. Have you seen Leglay lately?

MADELEINE

Not for a long time. I never go out.

VANNAIRE

Neither does he — except to visit his patients at the hospital, where he is the head doctor. He shows noble devotion.

MADELEINE

Like my father!

VANNAIRE

Like your father. And sometimes he goes to the Academy of Medicine. He works and works, alone and in sadness. He, too, has aged — a great deal —

MADELEINE

And I, too?

VANNAIRE

You are graver, more beautiful. That isn't "aging"—

MADELEINE (*with a vague smile*)

Oh, you only say that —!

VANNAIRE

He is much older than you. You didn't know his hair is almost white?

[*Madeleine, surprised, raises her eyes questioningly to Vannaire, then, without replying, drops her head heavily. Enter Mme. Thérat.*

MME. THÉRAT

How are you, Vannaire?

VANNAIRE (*going to Mme. Therat*)

How are you? And how is Thérat?

MME. THÉRAT (*sadly*)

Always the same: he says nothing. Ever since he began sending patients to other doctors, he's scarcely spoken a word, you know.

VANNAIRE

They say he suffers more since he stopped working.

MADELEINE

He has too much time to brood. Nothing ever excites him any longer. There is nothing to take his mind off the past — nor my mind off it, either. When he had his patients, he put into them his doubts, his fears, his hopes. Then he confided in me, and I feared and hoped with him. (*Then, pensively, as if speaking to herself*) That was forgetfulness, or the will to forget.

MME. THÉRAT (*to Vannaire*)

The child is the only one he speaks to now — and you. It seems you are the only one he can confide in.

VANNAIRE

Because I suffer as he does.

MME. THÉRAT

He seems to live with only one thought. So long as he had patients, and busied himself with them, it kept life in him, or at least some appearance of life. But since he's been idle, he says nothing, except to refer to his ill-health, that began —

VANNAIRE

Is he coming down-stairs?

MME. THÉRAT

I think so. But he hardly ever comes here, and then only to see a patient, whom he sends to another doctor. Another has just been announced.

VANNAIRE

Whom does he send them to?

MME. THÉRAT

I don't know; he never says. He doesn't tell you, Madeleine, does he?

MADELEINE

Never.

VANNAIRE

Nor me.

[*Enter Thérat. He looks much older and his face is thin and solemn.*

THÉRAT

Oh, it's you, Vannaire. Why didn't you come up? (*To his wife*) He hasn't come yet?

MME. THÉRAT

No.

MADELEINE

Father, I ought to warn you: M. Vannaire has

reminded us that *he* is coming to-day—you know: to see the boy.

THÉRAT (*impenetrably*)

Ah!

MME. THÉRAT

Again? So soon? But it hasn't been a month since his last visit?

MADELEINE

Yes it has, mother.

VANNAIRE

Exactly a month, Madame.

[*Thérat sits down.*

MME. THÉRAT

I'll see that the boy is ready. (*To Madeleine*) Up-stairs, as usual?

MADELEINE

Of course, mother.

[*Mme. Thérat goes out.*

VANNAIRE

Are you waiting for a patient?

THÉRAT

Yes. A few still come from time to time.

VANNAIRE

And you don't treat them yourself?

THÉRAT

I don't care to any longer.

VANNAIRE

Why not?

THÉRAT

I am too old. You don't write books any longer, do you?

VANNAIRE

Oh, yes, but I don't talk about it.

THÉRAT

You and I are old men — we're played out. If I were to treat patients, they would complain in a week's time because they were not completely cured, and go elsewhere — to young doctors. I prefer to send them away at once.

VANNAIRE

To whom?

THÉRAT

That depends: some to one, some to another —

VANNAIRE

To doctors who believe in your methods?

THÉRAT (*after a moment of hesitation — looking at him*) Of course. You don't imagine — ? What time do you expect him?

VANNAIRE

Whom?

THÉRAT

Him!

VANNAIRE

Oh, Leglay? Soon, I think. He generally comes about three.

THÉRAT

I see.

MADELEINE (*going to him*)

Poor father! I do make you suffer, don't I? It doesn't do you any good to know that he comes here.

VANNAIRE

Nonsense. It makes no difference to you, does it, Thérat? Madeleine is exaggerating.

[*Thérat says nothing, but puts his hand mechanically to his heart. All three are silent for a moment, then the bell rings.*

MADELEINE (*suddenly*)

The bell!

[*Thérat looks closely at her.*

VANNAIRE

Well?

MADELEINE

It's he!

VANNAIRE

Possibly.

[*She goes to the bay-window, Vannaire following. Thérat keeps his eyes fastened on her.*

MADELEINE (*in an undertone to Vannaire, as she listens*)

You say his hair is white? (*Both look out the window*) That's not he. It's the patient to see father. (*To Thérat*) We'll leave you.

[*Madeleine and Vannaire go out. Enter a servant a moment after, introducing the patient, a woman.*

PATIENT

Doctor!

THÉRAT

Madame!

PATIENT

I should like you to examine me. My throat has been bothering me. I've tried a few simple remedies:

gargled, inhaled, and so on, but the throat is only worse. My tonsils —

THÉRAT

Let me see — (*He takes a pallet and examines her throat*) Yes, yes, you ought to have come sooner.

PATIENT (*nervously*)

Is it very serious, Doctor?

THÉRAT

No, it's not *very* serious, but it *is* serious.

PATIENT

I shan't have to be — operated on?

THÉRAT (*after a pause*)

Operated — ? (*With an effort*) No — no — there's no necessity. Of course, you didn't know when you came: I am not practising any longer?

PATIENT

Oh!

THÉRAT

No. The only thing I take is an exceptional case now and then. You had better see another physician. (*With difficulty*) You'd better go to — to — go to Doctor Leglay — Paul Leglay, Rue Blanche. He will take good care of you; he is a very able physician.

PATIENT

Doctor Leglay, Rue Blanche. You don't think I'll have to have an operation?

THÉRAT

No, no, I'm sure you won't.

PATIENT

Thank you, Doctor.

THÉRAT

Just one word: don't say it was I who sent you. He is a little erratic — touchy, and he might be — you understand? Pride — physicians' pride!

PATIENT

Very well, Doctor, and thank you. You've given me courage. I was afraid I might have to be operated on. I was told you might want to —

[*Thérat rings. He smiles a bitter smile. The servant enters, and escorts the patient out of the room. Thérat returns slowly to his desk, throws down the pallet with a petulant gesture, then sits down, putting his hands over his eyes. Enter Mme. Thérat.*

MME. THÉRAT

Are you through?

THÉRAT

Oh, it's you?

MME. THÉRAT

Is it over?

THÉRAT

Yes.

MME. THÉRAT

Do you feel well? You aren't tired?

THÉRAT

I'm very well.

MME. THÉRAT

Did you send the patient away?

THÉRAT

Yes.

MME. THÉRAT

To whom?

THÉRAT

To whom? To — Doctor Blanche.

[*He rises. Enter Madeleine and Vannaire. Madeleine is agitated.*

THÉRAT

Are you coming up, Vannaire? We'll have a chat.

VANNAIRE

Suppose we stay here?

MADELEINE

You know, father, *he* is upstairs, with the boy.

MME. THÉRAT

Has he come? I didn't know. Are you sure?

MADELEINE (*feverishly*)

I'm positive I saw him!

[*Thérat turns to her.*

MME. THÉRAT

You saw him? How?

VANNAIRE

We met him just now on the stairs.

MADELEINE

I hadn't seen him for a long time. His hair is snow-white.

THÉRAT

Then he's here?

MADELEINE

Yes.

THÉRAT (*goes to her, takes her head between his hands, and gazes into her eyes*)

You look as if you were going to cry, Madeleine.

MADELEINE (*deeply moved*)

No, no, father. I — I'm not crying —

[*Her words are checked by a violent sob.*

MME. THÉRAT

What *is* the matter, Madeleine? What's wrong? You're not crying for him, are you? Not for him?

THÉRAT

Poor child!

MADELEINE

No, no, father. I don't — know — why I'm crying. The boy — up there — and — and — this is the first time I've seen *him!* (*She rises and looks at her father*) No, not for *him*, not for him!

THÉRAT

Poor child!

MADELEINE

I — I just need to cry. Please go, mother. I'm going up to my room. I'll be all right.

MME. THÉRAT

I'll come with you.

MADELEINE

No, mother. Leave me to myself. Don't worry.

[*She goes out.*

THÉRAT (*falling into a chair*)

My poor dear child!

[*He puts his hand to his heart, and closes his eyes for a moment.*

MME. THÉRAT (*going quickly to him*)

Are you still suffering?

THÉRAT

It's nothing. Dizziness. Madeleine is the one who suffers.

MME. THÉRAT

Yes, and you, too. But you both suffer for the same reason. It is *his* fault.

THÉRAT (*severely*)

Nanine! Now —

MME. THÉRAT

You're not going to defend him, are you? He took from us everything that was worth having: your reputation and our girl's happiness. He has ruined our life. When you turn pale and put your hand to your heart, I know you're thinking of *him!* It's he and what he did — just for his own reputation!

THÉRAT

Nanine, you must not say such things.

MME. THÉRAT

What! Do you think he was right?

THÉRAT

No, I don't. (*Pensively*) No — no. But I don't think he acted from selfish motives. We must at least give him his due. I believe he thought he was acting in the interest of science — and he was.

MME. THÉRAT

Science! Yes, ah, science — ! It's never satisfied, no matter how much one sacrifices to it.

THÉRAT

Nanine!

MME. THÉRAT

Science demands too much; it has taken away my happiness in life. I used to believe in it, when I was young, even when it was taking you from me. I saw it taking your youth from you, and mine from me. I was thrilled when you talked about it, and showed such splendid faith in it, when you told me of the great happiness it would bring us some day. I didn't rebel against it then. I was willing to grow old before my time, and see you giving yourself up to it. Science seemed to make you happy. And I was proud of you. I believed you would be rewarded with glory and a brilliant reputation. That was your only recompense. And it was in the name of science that that glory was stolen from you. It's always that way. Science demands every sacrifice, and gives nothing in return — except perhaps a brief make-believe glory that your own associates snatch from you the moment they are able. That's the way you get glory: steal it from some one else. It seems you have to make science over again, unmake it, and then make it over once more. If you have to do that, then it doesn't exist!

THÉRAT (*rising, then forcefully*)

Nanine, don't say that!

MME. THÉRAT

I've suffered too much — through you and through Madeleine. I've seen too much trickery. I know too much about it —

THÉRAT (*with sharp authority*)

Stop it! You insult us!

VANNAIRE

My dear friend, please be calm. No one is responsible —

THÉRAT

And leave us!

MME. THÉRAT (*nervously*)

But you —

THÉRAT (*quietly*)

Please — go.

MME. THÉRAT

You don't blame me? I didn't mean to —

THÉRAT (*with a bitter smile*)

No, no, you dear old wife. Not at all. Only, I don't like your very goodness, your love for Madeleine and me to make you say things that are unjust and untrue. Now I want to chat with Vannaire — quietly. Won't you leave us?

MME. THÉRAT

Certainly. (*She goes to the door*) You're quite sure you're not ill?

THÉRAT

No: I am very well.

[*She goes out.*

THÉRAT

Vannaire, I am simply terrified.

VANNAIRE

Why?

THÉRAT

I have just heard the only voice that has the power to make me hesitate and doubt: the voice of ignorance, my own ignorance.

VANNAIRE

My dear fellow, what are you saying? Others believe in you and admire you. You don't have to go outside this house: Madeleine, I —

THÉRAT

You?

VANNAIRE

Yes, I.

THÉRAT

No, Vannaire. You think a great deal of me, you know how devoted and disinterested my work has been; you recognize my enthusiasm, but you don't believe in me.

VANNAIRE

I believe in you as I believe in myself. I believe that you and I have done our work conscientiously and done it well.

THÉRAT

And that that work is now over.

VANNAIRE

Our function was to —

THÉRAT

But are you sure Madeleine still believes in me? She doesn't doubt — ?

VANNAIRE

I am positive.

THÉRAT

How?

VANNAIRE

She told me — an hour ago.

THÉRAT
Were you discussing me?

VANNAIRE
Yes.

THÉRAT
Only me?

VANNAIRE (*hesitating*)
You —

THÉRAT
And him!

VANNAIRE
Yes.

THÉRAT
What started you?

VANNAIRE
Why, his visits. She was upset, and I tried to soothe her.

THÉRAT
You were defending him!

VANNAIRE
I was defending only his intentions, as you yourself were.

THÉRAT
And what did she say?

VANNAIRE
At the end of our discussion she said, "When my father says he is right, then and then only will I believe."

THÉRAT (*fearfully*)
I? When I tell her?

VANNAIRE

But she is sure you won't, because you are so sure yourself. You are positive he is mistaken —

THÉRAT (*after a pause*)

Vannaire, you noticed Madeleine's agitation a few moments ago? You saw her cry. She loves him, doesn't she?

VANNAIRE (*embarrassed*)

Oh, I can't say.

THÉRAT

Be frank with me, Vannaire. You must. Madeleine's unhappiness is a very serious matter. She must not be allowed to suffer any longer on my account. I ought to have seen things sooner, but I was blind. It was just like a foolish old scientist to forget love. We have no right to sacrifice the lives of our children for the sake of a few months for ourselves. She still loves him, Vannaire, still, or once again —

VANNAIRE

Yes, I think she has always loved him. She is the sort of person who makes great efforts to stifle the affections. She experiences the martyr's bitter joy by suffering for her faith. You are her faith.

THÉRAT

And she suffers.

VANNAIRE

Yes.

THÉRAT

Why couldn't I have seen that? Why couldn't I have foreseen it? It was inevitable. (*A pause*)

Vannaire, bring her to me. I shall tell her myself that Paul is right —

VANNAIRE (*astonished*)

You'll tell her that? Why?

THÉRAT (*in a whisper*)

Because it is the truth. I now see it.

VANNAIRE (*nervously*)

The — the truth?

THÉRAT

You have known it for a long time. Go and bring her. Please — while I have the courage.

[*Vannaire, deeply stirred, goes out. Thérat sits motionless, staring at nothing. Madeleine enters after a few moments.*

MADELEINE

You wanted to see me, father?

THÉRAT

Yes, I want to say something to you. Did Vannaire hint — ?

MADELEINE

No.

THÉRAT

Come here, closer to me. Sit down here. (*She sits down near him*) I find it very hard to tell you. I can't speak very loud.

MADELEINE (*nervously*)

Father, what's the matter? Aren't you well?

THÉRAT

I have a confession to make, dear — my little girl, my Madeleine! What I have to say is painful, very painful. You know how I love you, and you know

I have always labored to make you happy. You don't doubt that, do you? If you have suffered through any fault of mine, it was only because I did not know, I did not understand —

MADELEINE

Oh, I know, father. I know how you love me!

THÉRAT

But what you don't and could not know is all you have meant to me. You are my child, my own flesh and blood, but you are something else besides. I have enjoyed glory of a sort, Madeleine, but I never cared for it except for your sake. You remember my triumphs, and the flattering things that were written about me, how I was made a leader among the scientists. I have known every sort of adulation. But never did any of it give me half the pleasure, the pride and joy, as when I saw the first glimmerings of admiration light up your little wondering eyes — when you began to understand things. From that time on, all my pride was centered in you; I worked to gain your approval, and only yours. Madeleine, I never felt so proud as on that day when you were little more than a child and understood very little of what you were saying, and you came to me after school and said: "Papa, they tell me you're a great scientist."

MADELEINE

Father, why are you telling me that?

THÉRAT

That you may know, and have a little pity —

MADELEINE

Pity? I admire you as I always did.

THÉRAT

Understand me, Madeleine. You must realize what you have been for me. You must be the judge, because it is you who will transmit memories of tenderness and memories of pride to your children. I have always thought of you as a sort of pledge to the future. You were the visible, the marvelous promise of to-morrow, the to-morrow of happiness for which I struggled, to which all men ought to be able to look forward, and be grateful at the same time to those who have gone before them. When you placed your confidence in me, Madeleine, I read the whole future in your eyes, and as your eyes reflected mine and you seemed to think the same thoughts and have the same faith, I hoped that some part of me would be passed on and live, and a little of all my efforts be remembered in the future.

MADELEINE

It will be, father!

THÉRAT

When I am with you I feel greater pride than with any one else, because I love you most. Only when people doubted my beliefs in your presence was I so anxious to refute them and prove I was right. I wanted to put a sacred mission in your hands. And before you I feel more humiliated to confess a mistake. I couldn't bear to see you even a little less proud than I.

MADELEINE

But I am proud of you, father. You have no mistake to confess.

THÉRAT (*his head bowed*)

Yes, yes, child —

MADELEINE (*quickly rising — anxiously*)

What mistake? — What mistake?

THÉRAT (*making a great effort*)

During the last few months, you know, I have not received any patients. I sent them to another physician. Madeleine, I — I have sent them to — to your husband!

MADELEINE

To Paul? Then — ?

THÉRAT

Yes. I believe — I believe — that he is right.

MADELEINE

For months!

[*She draws away toward the door, slowly.*

THÉRAT

I confess it, child, because I want you to be happy, I want you to live. But — but — you have no idea what this confession has cost me. I want you to feel just a little of your old pride in me. Be a little tender — toward — your father. See — I — I'm crying. I am — so — sad —

MADELEINE (*at the door*)

Yes, yes, father — ! But — (*She goes out quickly, as if she were walking on air*) Paul! Paul!

THÉRAT (*rises and tries to take a step toward the door, but falls*)

Madeleine! My child!

MADELEINE (*outside*)

Paul!

CURTAIN

ACT III

A simply furnished drawing-room. Thérat is seated in an armchair. He looks very old. Madeleine, whose hair is beginning to turn grey, sits at a small table, writing. After a moment, enter Edmond — Madeleine's son.

EDMOND
Grandfather, I've come to say good-bye.

THÉRAT
Where are you going?

EDMOND
To class.

THÉRAT
What is it this afternoon?

EDMOND
The clinic.

THÉRAT
What professor?

EDMOND
Ferruel.

THÉRAT
Oh, yes. He's new, isn't he? They tell me he's just published a book, an important book.

EDMOND
I don't know. But he's interesting. And the course is fascinating.

MADELEINE (*smiling*)
You find them all fascinating.

EDMOND

Yes — I only wish there were more of them.

MADELEINE

So you enjoy them?

EDMOND

I'm mad about them!

MADELEINE

Do you hear that, father? You must have been like that at twenty, weren't you?

THÉRAT

Yes. Oh, dear, yes. (*After a pause, he says bitterly*) Poor boy!

EDMOND

Why, grandfather? Isn't it splendid to be so enthusiastic? A doctor who isn't excited about his subject would make a pretty poor shopkeeper.

MADELEINE

A doctor? But you're not a doctor yet.

EDMOND

I shall be in two years.

MADELEINE

Are you sure?

EDMOND

Absolutely. (*To Thérat*) But I've never seen any one so enthusiastic as you!

[*He sits down near Thérat.*

THÉRAT

Yes, I was, of course, I used to be. But I have suffered a great deal as a result. (*He puts his hand to his heart*) But I am not any longer.

EDMOND

Nonsense!

THÉRAT

No: it is all too heart-breaking — too deceptive. And you must remember, the science I loved is now an antiquated science, old like me. No, I'm not enthusiastic now, and I no longer want to be.

EDMOND

Do you really believe that, grandfather? Then why do you ask me questions every day about my courses, and what I am taught? Why do you explain the things my teachers don't explain to me? You're a wonderful teacher, and you *are* enthusiastic, grandfather. You inspire me.

THÉRAT (*raising his head — with a smile which is full of anguish*)

Then I am still good for something?

MADELEINE

Father! The idea.

THÉRAT

Well, if I am, it's in spite of myself. I don't intend any harm — and it is harmful. I am afraid that there will come a day when you will not forgive me: the day you learn. — Now you must run on to your class, boy — it is time —

EDMOND

Good-bye, grandfather. I must be off. I'll come back and tell you what we've done. Good-bye, mother.

[*He kisses Madeleine and goes out.*

MADELEINE (*going to Thérat*)

Don't you need anything, father?

THÉRAT

No, thank you.

MADELEINE

You're not suffering?

THÉRAT

Not very much, but you know I never feel very well.

MADELEINE

Doesn't Edmond tire you?

THÉRAT

Edmond? Why?

MADELEINE

He's so exuberant.

THÉRAT

No, no, he's a distraction. Tell me: he said he'd be a doctor in two years' time. He's determined, is he? He wants to practise? Are you going to let him?

MADELEINE

Naturally; you know very well —

THÉRAT

But I always hoped —

MADELEINE

Why? He's born to it. He loves science, and apparently science loves him. Think, he will have finished his studies at twenty-two. That's really remarkable.

THÉRAT

Yes.

MADELEINE

And then, it's natural; he'll be a scientist, like his grandfather and his father. He'll prove worthy of them and their profession.

THÉRAT

But his grandfather is nothing at all now.

MADELEINE

Don't say such cruel things. You know it's not true. You know every one respects you, you know how deeply Edmond admires you, and that his ambition is to be like you.

THÉRAT

Yes, yes — I know. But — I am afraid. (*He takes her hand in his*) You know, Madeleine, I don't blame you, but one day — the day I cried, — and you left me alone —

MADELEINE

Father!

THÉRAT

I am not blaming you — it was inevitable. I often think of that day, and I am afraid the time will come when science will take my grandson away from me as it did my daughter. Some day Edmond will learn that of everything I told him not a shred is true. I shall be alone then.

MADELEINE

Father, please don't talk that way. Every one here loves and respects you. Everywhere you are considered a great man.

THÉRAT

I hope I'll never see the day. But I don't think I'll last —

[*He puts his hand to his heart again. Enter Leglay.*

LEGLAY

Has Edmond gone?

MADELEINE

Yes.

LEGLAY (*very respectfully to Thérat*)

Master, you haven't given your answer about the Academy?

THÉRAT

The Academy?

LEGLAY

I told you: they asked me to insist on your coming. They want to honor you in public. They haven't seen you for twelve years, you know.

THÉRAT

They shall never see me.

MADELEINE

I think you're wrong, father —

THÉRAT

No, I'm right. I don't want to, and I am right. No, what would be the use?

[*Enter Vannaire.*

VANNAIRE

I was told to come in, and I came. How are you, Madeleine? Hello, Paul? How are you, Thérat?

THÉRAT

Well, thanks.

VANNAIRE

Grand council, eh?

MADELEINE

We're trying to persuade father to go to the Academy of Medicine, where they want to see him again.

THÉRAT

Exhume me! No, no. (*He rises painfully*) Vannaire, give me your arm, will you? We'll have a chat in the garden, and watch the dead leaves.

[*Vannaire offers his arm to Thérat, and the two go out.*

LEGLAY (*sadly*)

The same old story!

MADELEINE

What do you mean?

LEGLAY

Always the same resentment.

MADELEINE

No, no, you mustn't say that. He's not resentful toward you.

LEGLAY

But his silence, his obstinate silence —

MADELEINE

It's not only when you are present: he was that way even before you came back. He's often that way with me, and he was with mother. He didn't blame her for anything. Think how he grieved for her! He talks only with Vannaire and Edmond — perhaps because they stand for the past and the future in his mind, while you and I are the present. And he suffers, you know. It's our fault.

[*She sits down. A pause.*

LEGLAY

Madeleine — you, too —

MADELEINE

It's the fault of his illness. Every time he puts his hand to his heart, it is like a reproach. That is

our fault. You yourself told me that with his power of resistance, he would have lived a long time. It's our fault —

LEGLAY

No, it is not our fault; it was the fault of the facts over which we had no control. Those facts crushed him. They made us suffer, too. We weren't selfish: we sacrificed ourselves. Remember that.

MADELEINE

Oh, I remember!

LEGLAY

Think of those eight terrible years, while I waited for you. We were young, and we loved each other. You never stopped loving me, did you?

MADELEINE

Oh, how I loved you!

LEGLAY

I spent days and nights in torture, when memories and desires caused me fearful struggles with my conscience. There were times when I was on the point of throwing everything to the winds and giving up every attempt to win you back. And then I would return to my clinic or my laboratory, ashamed. And I found in the anxious look of a patient the power to carry out my sacrifice.

MADELEINE

Yes, we have suffered. For the sake of our pride, wasn't it?

LEGLAY

Possibly, Madeleine. If neither you nor I had had it, perhaps everything would have blown over, but

it would have been shameful. Pride, yes, but it was the pride that refuses to be happy at the price of base compromise, the pride of suffering for something great — for faith.

MADELEINE

Faith?

LEGLAY

Yes. The same faith was in us both.

MADELEINE

But we suffered because we thought differently.

LEGLAY

So it appeared. You believed in your father, didn't you? Why?

MADELEINE

Because I loved and venerated him.

LEGLAY

You loved him because you saw in him the work of a lifetime, devotion to mankind, the great unknown masses; an unswerving ideal of happiness for others; you saw in him a great, unselfish conscience, that thought and acted for the good of others. You admired your father, who refused to think of himself. It was my ambition to be like him. We were both urged on by the same sentiment. But he stood between and separated us, caused us untold suffering. If it had not been for him, we should have been just selfish lovers, happy, but with no true ideal — fleshly and of the earth. But the day we came together again, we enjoyed something new, something grand, uplifting: the grave joy of deserved and ennobled happiness. (*Going to her and taking her hand*) You felt that, Madeleine, I know you did.

MADELEINE (*troubled*)

I don't — know —

LEGLAY

I'm sure you did. Before we were separated, a sort of shame made you turn your face in moments of extreme passion. Now you feel that our love is not merely a futile pleasure; you feel that within us there is something more than ourselves. You look at me and you see the whole world — everything that I struggle for. (*They embrace*) In this kiss there is a touch of bitter remembrance: the fears and hopes we have experienced prolong it, carry us beyond and above ourselves. In you it is the whole world I love, and its aspirations toward happiness, paid for by suffering.

MADELEINE (*putting her hands about his head and drawing it towards her*)

I see that in your eyes.

[*They kiss again and look into each other's eyes. A pause. Enter Thérat, slowly, leaning on Vannaire's arm.*

VANNAIRE

Brrr! It's getting cold! It's more comfortable indoors.

THÉRAT

Cold outside — and sad!

[*He sits down.*

VANNAIRE

No, not sad. To-day we see the beautiful melancholy splendor of autumn, but there's nothing sad about it.

MADELEINE

Isn't it beautiful? The leaves are getting richer and richer every hour.

THÉRAT

And more fragile and tremulous.

MADELEINE

They are never more beautiful.

THÉRAT

Yes — to those who can hope to see them bloom again! In a month's time the branches will be only black lines against a livid sky. They are already alone in the garden. (*To Vannaire*) That rose, that last rose — I showed you the petals, so withered and faded! And the dead leaves look like flesh at an autopsy. I remember that rose the day before yesterday. It was radiant then; its color seemed to affect the atmosphere. It stood so straight on its stem that it seemed to exercise some sort of power and be worthy of its high-sounding name: "Glory of Dijon!" What is left? A little decayed matter, which will become dust to-morrow; nothing of the marvelous brilliancy that proudly shot its color into the sunshine.

VANNAIRE

Now you're thinking of yourself. But something *does* remain. In your memory there remains that brilliancy.

THÉRAT

My memory will soon be dead.

VANNAIRE

It will exist in other memories. Other roses will

bloom, and people will watch and examine them more carefully because of the memory of the first. What has once truly lived never dies; what has been appreciated and understood, lives. Every dead rose has, before it withered, impressed its color on the soul of man. When, to-day, we try to think of a delicate tint with which to adorn ourselves, all the flowers in the world, all that have ever existed, have their share in our choice; a combination and modification of their tints goes to make the desired shade, which gives us joy. Every flower has left its streak of color; we do not always see them, but we feel their influence, because those who have gone before have seen them. No, Thérat, nothing that has once truly lived ever dies.

[*A pause. All four are deep in thought. All at once Thérat, with a slight sigh, puts his hand to his heart. Vannaire, Madeleine and Leglay dart toward him.*

MADELEINE

Father, what's the matter? (*Thérat does not answer*) Father!

LEGLAY (*feeling Thérat's pulse*)

Master!

[*A long pause. Thérat's head falls heavily against the back of the chair. They all look anxiously at him.*

THÉRAT (*raising his head*)

It's nothing — not this time. I'm — I'm still good for — (*Looking at Leglay, who holds his wrist*) How long do you think, Leglay?

LEGLAY (*embarrassed*)

Oh, there is no reason why —

THÉRAT

Come, come, you know as well as I do —

LEGLAY

I see no alarming symptoms.

THÉRAT (*speaking with difficulty*)

Look, look at that hand. (*He shows his hand*) It — it's arter — arteri — help me: arteri —

LEGLAY

Arteriosclerosis?

THÉRAT

Withered! Yes. Already — you see — I don't remem — I can't think of the word. Isn't that a symptom, Leglay? That's a phenomenon of a — of a — (*With a gesture of profound despair*) I don't remember! Of — of — aph —!

LEGLAY

Aphasia? No, no. You're just a little tired and dizzy.

THÉRAT

Leglay, in a month — two months, at the outside, I shall be dead.

MADELEINE (*shocked*)

Father!

VANNAIRE

Now, now, Thérat, you only imagine —

LEGLAY

You are mistaken.

THÉRAT

I am not mistaken. If I can't think of the words, I know the facts. I know — and I see. I can see my heart and my arteries. I know they are used up,

worn out, practically empty. The heart may be good for another month, but no more —

LEGLAY

I assure you, master, you're exaggerating. The disease is not so far advanced.

THÉRAT (*with authority*)

You are mistaken. You don't know. You ought to know. I'll — let me — explain: the hypo — hypos — (*irritably*) Oh, I can't remember the word!

LEGLAY

Hyposystole?

THÉRAT

Yes. (*Thérat looks intently at Leglay*) Yes, but — I — I see, you know what I am going to — to tell you. You know as well as I — better, because you know the words. I know things, and I realize that my heart is atrophied. I — know what will cause my death, but I can't explain it. It would be better to die as soon as possible. I'm not a scientist. Leglay, tell me — tell me — the word hypo —

LEGLAY

Hyposystole.

THÉRAT

Hy — po — sys — tole. Hy — po — sys — sys — No, I can't! It's all over!

VANNAIRE

Come, now, my dear Thérat, this isn't anything. You're just tired out —

MADELEINE

Of course, father. Don't think about it any longer. Rest, and don't wear yourself out.

THÉRAT

It's all over! I don't remember! The words leave me, one by one. I don't know anything. I — I'm dying —

[*Enter Edmond.*

MADELEINE (*surprised*)

Home so soon?

EDMOND

Yes. I didn't wait till class was over.

MADELEINE.

You're excited? What happened?

EDMOND

Oh — Ferruel, the professor, spoke of father —

LEGLAY

Of me?

EDMOND

Yes, and grandfather, too.

THÉRAT (*rising*)

Me?

LEGLAY

What did he say?

EDMOND

He spoke of your work — your methods — he criticised them —

[*Thérat listens breathlessly.*

LEGLAY

But you are allowed to discuss questions in class? You said something? What did you say? You didn't let *that* pass — ?

EDMOND (*hesitating*)

I said nothing at all.

LEGLAY

What!

EDMOND

Because I had nothing to say.

[*Thérat, with renewed effort, stands up even straighter than before.*

LEGLAY (*agitated*)

Then do you think Ferruel is right, and I wrong? Do you believe that? You didn't defend me?

EDMOND

You see — in a way, he is right. He said —

LEGLAY

What? And you pretend to judge? You must learn first, or keep still!

VANNAIRE

Leglay, don't get excited.

MADELEINE

Paul!

THÉRAT (*leaning on the arm of the chair*)

Let him talk, Leglay. It's his turn now!

LEGLAY (*in a whisper*)

His turn — !

THÉRAT

Tell us, son —

EDMOND

It's this way: Ferruel cited examples proving that certain curative methods are not always effective. (*To Leglay*) You never denied that, did you? He praised you highly, but he added that you were wrong in applying your methods too rigorously.

He thinks it's dangerous always to begin with experimenting —

LEGLAY

He doesn't know what he's talking about! Of course, Ferruel thinks I'm becoming too prominent.

THÉRAT

Leglay, don't talk that way. I used to think the same of you, and I was wrong. Go on, son, what else did he say?

EDMOND

He says that there are positive means of knowing certain cases where the therapeutic method is useless. Then he talked at length about you, grandfather, told about your methods of diagnosis, which he thinks splendid —

THÉRAT (*looking proudly at Madeleine*)

You see?

EDMOND

I couldn't say anything, because he was so respectful to you both, and he admired you.

LEGLAY

Do you think so?

EDMOND

Yes, he said you'd both done splendid service in the cause of science, only that you had both gone too far in the application of your ideas and the valuable discoveries you had made. He says you complement each other, and that the new science will take something from each of you as a starting point in the search for a new method, and definite conclusions —

LEGLAY

Definite! Ferruel going to lay down definite conclusions! *You* youngsters going to arrive at definite conclusions!

VANNAIRE

Leglay, don't lose your temper. Your son is just as you were at twenty. His convictions are just as strong as yours were. Let him keep them. Perhaps it's absurd, or unjust, but you know it is necessary.

THÉRAT (*slowly, quietly, with an effort, but with passion*)

Yes, yes, it is necessary, it *is* necessary, and just, Vannaire. You must let him believe, because he is going to search. Allow him to believe he will find the ultimate, the definite conclusions, for without that faith he would not seek them. Perhaps, perhaps, Leglay, *he* will crush us, but it makes no difference. Leglay, come, give me your hand. I — I begin to understand; I can see things clearly now. You were right, Leglay, not to give in to my selfish pride; and Edmond is right in looking fairly and squarely at your work and mine. Ferruel has a clear vision — and — it — it's always that way. One after another, we work at the same task; even when we seem to contradict each other, and disagree and dispute, even when we are mistaken, we are leading men toward the same goal. Each of us marks a stage in progress. The future is never mistaken. I did what it was necessary for me to do. You too, Leglay. Madeleine's instinct was right when it drove her toward you. It was right that she should disagree; without that struggle, our labor would have proved fruitless. (*To Edmond*) You, son, work

on, and don't be afraid to attack what we have established. Go on, your faith will always help you; go —

[*He falls into his chair, exhausted, his eyes closed. Every one goes toward him.*

EDMOND (*deeply stirred*)

Go! Father, I don't —

THÉRAT (*opening his eyes again*)

Yes, yes, you will go on if you think it necessary and worth while. Promise me, promise me. You know I haven't much longer to live. My mind is clear now. I can see you going on, without turning back, along the road we once trod. You are right. Go on — ahead —

CURTAIN

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